



Introduction

2001: A watershed year for international efforts

The year 2001 marked a watershed in the global effort to understand and address the problems created by the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons. The *United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects* represented an unprecedented high-level effort to achieve international agreement on the nature of the problem and the most important measures to deal with its different dimensions. Its *Programme of Action*,¹ adopted by consensus, represented the culmination of several years of effort within and outside of the UN system to raise the profile of the small arms issue on the international agenda. In the months leading up to the Conference itself, almost all governmental and non-governmental activity was directed towards influencing its outcome.

The *Small Arms Survey 2001* was also successfully launched at the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference in New York, and was widely cited and used throughout. It continues to be the single most important source of information and research on various aspects of the small arms issue. Such attention testifies to the continuing shortage of reliable and impartial information and analysis on different aspects of the problem of small arms. In this edition of the *Survey*, we break new ground by focusing on the humanitarian dimensions of small arms availability and use, as well as by providing original research on arms-producing companies. We also examine in depth the emerging field of weapons collection and destruction.

It is of course too early to draw up a definitive balance sheet for the UN Conference. Our analysis of the conference, presented in Chapter 5, focuses on its ambitious and far-reaching goals: to define the nature of the problem; to provide a tool for policy-makers and activists; to mobilize national and multilateral resources; and to promote the development of international and national norms.

Significant progress was made towards these goals. The *Programme of Action* commits states to implement a wide range of measures at the national, regional, and global levels affecting the trade (legal and illicit), production, and holdings of small arms and light weapons. These measures include strengthening national regulation of the production and transfer of small arms; ensuring that manufacturers mark all weapons (and keep appropriate records) to allow tracing of seized weapons; improving the system of end-user certification to diminish the risk of diversion and illicit trafficking; encouraging the destruction of weapons seized in criminal investigations, collected in post-conflict disarmament programmes, or surplus to national requirements; and increasing the security of small arms stocks. Such measures, if implemented, would go a long way towards improving the situation worldwide.

On the other hand, the *Programme of Action*'s language provides states with a wide margin to exercise discretion or interpretation, via such clauses as 'where applicable', 'as appropriate', 'where needed', or 'on a voluntary basis'. Many important issues were also dropped from the *Programme of Action*, such as commitments to negotiate an international mechanism to trace illicit small arms (only a UN feasibility study was agreed), initiatives to regulate the civilian possession of weapons, increased transparency in the production, stockpiling, and trade in small arms, specific criteria (such as a code of conduct) governing authorized exports,

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and greater regulation of arms brokering.² And finally, documents themselves, no matter how well crafted, do not themselves destroy surplus weapons, secure stockpiles, punish illicit traffickers, or increase the security of vulnerable groups.

The success of the *Programme of Action* will ultimately be measured by its ability to catalyse a wide range of multi-lateral and national measures. Compared with the multilateral climate on the issue only five years ago, a relatively wide consensus has emerged that the unconstrained availability of small arms and light weapons ought to be addressed multilaterally. Small arms are, in other words, 'independent variables' in complex (and often conflictual) situations that are susceptible to concrete policy measures.

The role of the Small Arms Survey

How will the Conference have an impact on the work of the Small Arms Survey? In addition to our ongoing research activities, over the past year the staff and collaborators of the Small Arms Survey were active in different aspects of the Conference process. Field research projects were also conducted throughout 2001 in Georgia, Yemen, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), and elsewhere.

The *Programme of Action* highlights a wide range of possible negative consequences associated with the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons. These include:

- increasing the intensity of contemporary conflicts;
- diminishing the security of vulnerable groups such as women and children or refugees and internally displaced persons;
- increasing the violence associated with large-scale criminal activity (and the concomitant burden on the criminal justice system);
- eroding development gains and the prospects for socio-economic development;
- threatening humanitarian relief operations and workers; and
- increasing the public health burden associated with firearms violence.

Small arms and light weapons are implicated in complex ways with all these problems. Little work, however, has been done to assess systematically the impact of small arms availability and/or use, or to evaluate the effectiveness of particular policy measures. The Small Arms Survey project has an important role to play here, within its core mission of independent research and analysis of all aspects of the problem of small arms and light weapons. Our work is slowly shifting from collecting existing information to *generating* new data through longer-term research and information-gathering projects and partnerships.

Our focus on the small arms themselves (production, stockpiles, transfers) is also complemented by research efforts that focus on the *impact* and effects of small arms and light weapons proliferation, and on the evaluation of *measures* to deal with the problems they pose. This research is attempting to answer questions such as:

- What are the long-term costs and consequences of small arms availability, proliferation, and misuse?
- What are the costs and benefits associated with different policy measures and strategies?
- What are the costs of inaction (such as growing insecurity, stalled socio-economic development, distortions in economic allocations, and declining provision of basic services)?

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This kind of research requires baseline data collection in affected states and regions, information-gathering systems for surveillance research (e.g. concerning health and policing impacts and costs), long-term research partnerships, and conceptual and practical tools for assessing the impact of small arms proliferation on humanitarian initiatives and socio-economic development. We make a start on this ambitious agenda in Chapter 4, which deals with the humanitarian impacts of small arms. New projects have already been launched in some of these areas, in collaboration with a wide range of institutional partners.

Beyond the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference

The conference process is only one piece of a much larger and more complex tapestry of efforts to tackle the problems posed by the accumulation and use of small arms and light weapons. Internationally, one of the most prominent areas of activity has been weapons collection and destruction programmes, a survey of which can be found in Chapter 7 of this yearbook. Recent initiatives by the United Nations Development Programme in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Albania have also laid the foundation for expanded collection and destruction programmes, often linked with projects for the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants in post-conflict settings. Another area of activity, centred around the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has focused on stockpile security, formal information exchanges, and the enhancement of national legislative and export control systems through bilateral and multilateral capacity-building efforts. Finally, grassroots initiatives, especially in Latin America, South Asia, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, are also expanding. These focus on the local and human impacts of weapons proliferation, such as urban crime, communal conflicts, or large-scale insurgencies. All of these efforts involve a wide range of partners and stakeholders, from states to international organizations, armed forces, national police, local government authorities, and non-governmental organizations. They testify to the multi-dimensional nature of the problem and to the need to engage a wide range of actors depending on the particular context. In an attempt to understand better some of these dimensions, Chapter 4, covering the effects of small arms proliferation and use, focuses on one particular set of actors: those affected by the consequences of conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies.

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Highlights from the yearbook

The *Small Arms Survey 2002* updates and extends our previous research and tackles some new topics. Chapters on production, stockpiles, transfers, and measures build on the *Small Arms Survey 2001*, while our assessment of weapons collection and destruction and the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference represents new areas of attention. And, as noted above, the chapter on 'effects' narrows its focus in this yearbook to concentrate on the humanitarian impacts of small arms.

Chapter 1 (Products and Producers) focuses on developing baseline data on small arms **companies** instead of producer states, and attempts to identify the most important arms producing firms worldwide. Our research database now includes information on approximately 1,000 companies that produce (or have the capacity to produce) small arms and ammunition, in nearly 100 states. As a result, our total estimated annual worldwide production of small arms and light weapons and ammunition has increased to approximately USD 7.4 billion, including both commercial and military-style firearms. This increase in our estimate of the value of global production does *not* necessarily reflect an increase in the volume of production; in fact, many firms remain in a financially questionable state,

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and overall demand for new weapons does not appear to be increasing. In many states production is also dormant or *ad hoc*, or limited to ammunition. But the *Survey* now has a clear basis on which to build more in-depth research into specific firms, states, and regions, and this year's chapter makes a start by examining two of the world's most significant licensors of small arms: FN Herstal (Belgium) and Heckler and Koch (Germany/UK), whose weapons are produced under licence in more than 35 countries worldwide.

Chapter 2 (Stockpiles): Our estimate of total global stockpiles of small arms and light weapons has risen this year to at least 638 million, significantly higher than the 2001 estimate of at least 551 million. Why the relatively large change? The main reason is a more refined (and higher) estimate of the total civilian holdings of weapons that now includes many states and regions, including in particular China and South Asia, for which reliable estimates were previously unavailable. Calculations of government (mainly military) and insurgent-force holdings of small arms have remained relatively stable.

As the chapter points out, however, it is easy to become obsessed with these figures and to miss their wider significance. The main purpose of estimating military holdings of weapons is to encourage states to practise greater transparency in this area, one of the last bastions of military secrecy. From such transparency can come accountability and dialogue, especially concerning the development of appropriate criteria for determining excessive and destabilizing accumulations of weapons, and for identifying weapons that are surplus to national requirements.

Chapter 3 (Transfers): We have refined our estimate of global transfers of small arms and light weapons to USD 4 billion a year. Small arms transfers have proved to be an extremely difficult area to research. This year, however, we have attempted to analyse more systematically two areas: the overall level of transparency in the trade (and improvements in it), and the variety of ways in which small arms move from the legal to the illicit markets. These vectors include arms supplies to non-state actors, violations of arms embargoes or end-user undertakings, leakage from state arsenals or private owners, battlefield recoveries, and the 'ant trade'. Given the debate over the scope of the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference, which treated the illicit trade in 'all its aspects', it is important to note that virtually all illicit weapons begin their life cycle in legal production and trade, and that greater transparency and oversight of the legal trade is thus a crucial tool for tackling illicit transfers.

Chapter 4 (Humanitarian Impacts) draws on fieldwork conducted in various countries for the Reference Group on Small Arms of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee. To date, almost all the evidence we have is anecdotal, although it almost all points in the same direction: increased availability of small arms exacerbates humanitarian crises, and increases the difficulty (or cost) associated with humanitarian and relief efforts. The chapter identifies a series of indicators, and draws together evidence from field studies in a variety of countries to demonstrate the direct (death and injury) and indirect (displacement, reduced access to basic services) impact of small arms in humanitarian crises and complex emergencies. It also examines the frameworks of international humanitarian and human rights law within which small arms could potentially be considered, and identifies some of the limits of a humanitarian approach to the problem.

Chapter 5 (UN Conference): Our analysis of the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference provides an accessible overview of the main issues for non-experts, discussing not just the outcome of the Conference but also some of the diplomatic and political complexities of the process that led up to it. It also tries to reflect the very different views that exist concerning the process and outcomes of the Conference, including the role played by NGOs. The main points from the chapter (and the Conference) have been presented above. Ultimately, the success of the Conference and its outcome will be judged not by what it accomplished but by how the international community uses the outcome to develop concrete measures.

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Chapter 6 (Measures) examines a series of regulatory regimes proposed or employed, at the national, regional, and global levels, for the purpose of controlling small arms at various points in their life cycle. While the coverage is selective, the areas the chapter examines—including marking and tracing, end-use certification, stockpile management, and the regulation of civilian possession—are widely recognized as key components of broader efforts to control small arms. These studies are complemented by an examination of a specific instrument (the recently concluded *Firearms Protocol*), a subregion (eastern Africa), and a type of actor (NGOs). The chapter highlights the contrasting stages of development of the various control regimes, with the regulation of arms brokering lagging far behind, despite growing recognition of the crucial role illicit brokering plays in small arms proliferation. The chapter also points to the limitations imposed by divergent state practices in many of these areas.

Chapter 7 (Weapons Collection and Destruction) directs a spotlight on what is becoming a growing area of international activity. It traces the origins of weapons collection programmes, and analyses some of their early successes and failures. It also highlights the variety of different approaches that have been attempted, and stresses that a number of factors shape the success or failure of any intervention. This analysis is especially important for policy-makers and advocates, given the importance that weapons collection (and broader DDR programmes) are going to play over the next few years.

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Conclusion

The forward-looking process that was established by the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference, which includes an international meeting in 2003 to review implementation of the *Programme of Action*, ensures that political attention will remain focused on small arms issues for years to come. The expansion of specific national, bilateral, and multilateral projects in different regions also ensures that data collection, evaluation, and analysis will remain a crucial task for the Small Arms Survey project. In addition to pursuing this aim, the *Small Arms Survey 2003* will focus more specifically on the developmental dimension of small arms availability and use, and will present in-depth case studies of specific countries and regions, in order to develop insights and knowledge that is useful to all small arms stakeholders.

In all aspects of its work, and especially in the 2002 edition of the *Survey*, the Small Arms Survey project tries to draw attention to the human dimension of the small arms issue. This is not dramatic license, but rather based on our belief that the costs of small arms proliferation and use are ultimately meaningful only if measured in human terms. This approach poses several challenges. Sometimes the effects or consequences can, if approached with care, be measured, weighed, and compared (the economic burden of health and injury, for example), in order to provide an impetus to political action or innovative policy interventions. That the effects are often intangible and difficult to measure and compare makes them, however, no less important for us to grasp.

Endnotes

1 United Nations General Assembly. 2001. *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*. 20 July. Reproduced in UN document A/CONF.192/15.

2 These were the main issues identified by major NGO groups, including the Biting the Bullet project (London), the Small Arms Working Group (Washington), and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).