



Press Release

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PREVENTABLE DIVERSION OF SMALL ARMS FUELS CRIME, INSURGENCY—NEW REPORT Up to 650,000 civilian-owned weapons lost yearly

The diversion of small arms and light weapons is a major source of firearms for criminals and insurgents around the world, underlines the 2008 edition of the *Small Arms Survey*. Diverted arms shipments—in which arms are redirected to unauthorized end users—can range from small packages of components for civilian firearms to hundred-ton shipments of military-grade light weapons. The redirection can occur at any moment in the transfer chain and may involve the participation of corrupt government officials. Since 1987, major documented diversions have provided small arms to Afghan non-state groups, Colombian rebels as well as their paramilitary opponents, and unknown—but likely criminal or insurgent—end users in Sri Lanka and Iraq, as well as embargoed regimes such as Somalia and Liberia.

‘Diversion is particularly dangerous because it can channel large volumes of weapons to individuals and groups intent on victimizing civilians,’ said Keith Krause, Programme Director of the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey. ‘We know the risk factors for diversion, the typical scenarios, as well as the methods that can stop much of this activity from occurring. In fact, preventing diversion is an area where states can have a significant impact for relatively little investment.’

The *Small Arms Survey 2008: Risks and Resilience* reviews the practices of the world’s leading arms-exporting states with a view to determining how well they meet their obligation under the *UN Programme of Action* ‘to ensure the effective control’ of small arms transfers. While states are not transparent about their compliance practices, it is clear that they neglect post-shipment controls—an important and cost-effective means of preventing diversion.

The *Survey* also reports on the widespread diversion of small arms through leakage from state and civilian stockpiles, finding that this is primarily due to negligence. In Northern Kenya, for example, 40 per cent of ammunition on the illicit market originally belonged to the Kenyan security forces. Such stockpile diversion contributes to armed violence and crime in many countries. Many aspects of stockpile security can be improved by relatively low-cost improvements to accounting, monitoring, and the physical security of arms and ammunition. Unchecked, the current estimated diversion rate of one per every 1,000 civilian weapons represents a loss of some 650,000 firearms per year.

This edition of the *Survey* also reveals that:

- The top exporters of small arms and light weapons for 2005 (those with an annual export value of at least USD 100 million) according to available data were the United States, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Brazil, the Russian Federation, and China.
- The top importers of small arms and light weapons for 2005 (those with an annual export value of at least USD 100 million) according to available data were the United States, Saudi Arabia, Canada, France, and Germany.
- At least 51 countries currently produce light weapons, such as shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank guided weapons, and heavy machine guns.
- Out of some 200 million military firearms worldwide, at least 76 million can be considered surplus.
- The intentional destruction of surplus military small arms averages about 430,000 weapons annually. Yet when considering the disposal of surplus military small arms, states often choose export over destruction.
- The 2008 Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer finds that the most transparent major small arms exporters are the United States, Italy, Switzerland, France, the Slovak Republic, and the United Kingdom, in that order. The least transparent are Iran and North Korea, both scoring zero.

Published by Cambridge University Press, the *Small Arms Survey 2008: Risks and Resilience* is the eighth annual global analysis of small arms issues. An independent research project funded by numerous governments, the Small Arms Survey is the principal source of public information and analysis on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. ■

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