

INTRODUCTION

Since 1997, the Quaker United Nations Office, the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research have collaborated in bringing expert presentations on issues in contemporary arms control and disarmament to the international community in Geneva. These presentations have been addressed to the members of the diplomatic missions in Geneva, and our goal has been to offer high-quality analytical perspectives on contemporary issues in a "user friendly" format related to the policy development needs and possibilities of this particular community.

The focus of the Geneva Forum since 1998 has been the issue of small arms and light weapons. When we began our work together in late 1996, this issue was beginning to make itself felt at the international level. The UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms had begun its work, and other international efforts were under way. But it was very early, and there was only limited attention being given to small arms and light weapons concerns in Geneva. In developing a series of seminars on this emerging issue area, we set as our goals: to focus attention on the issues of small arms and light weapons proliferation to contribute to the development of multilateral policy initiatives and action plans; to publicize innovative and practical ideas that have emerged from recent research or field experience; to build a "community of dialogue" on these issues; and to develop and encourage further activities or research that address the ongoing concerns of the policy community in Geneva and beyond.

In this small volume, the reader will find the summary results of the seminars that were held between May 1998 and November 1999. It is difficult to measure how close we have come to achieving the lofty goals we set ourselves. In any case, our small arms initiatives continue. But we believe that the series thus far has contributed to consolidating the debate and increasing understanding of the small arms *problématique* within the international community in Geneva. We hope, through this volume, to reinforce the presentations that were made by our experts by making them available in summary form to those who attended one or more of the seminars and to a wider audience.

Those who feel progress is slow in tackling the issue of small arms and light weapons can take comfort from the fact that today, in contrast to when we began our work, there is a range of quality initiatives being undertaken in Geneva – including ongoing projects of our own institutions – which are making important policy-relevant contributions. And Geneva is developing as an important global node on small arms issues.

In the series, we have not been able to offer presentations on all the questions which make up the contemporary understanding of the small arms *problématique*. What the reader will find, however, is an interesting range of orientations (including comments from participants in the seminars) on small arms and light weapons issues that should assist in an overall understanding of what is at stake. There are presentations on the complex questions related to the small arms problem and its manifestations in particular regional settings (Smith, Berman, Garcia-Peña). Practical issues related both to assessing the flows of small arms (Laurance) and to measuring the effects of small arms availability (Coupland and Meddings) are included. Here too the reader will find an analysis of the particular role the availability of surplus weapons plays in the problem of small arms proliferation and the management dilemmas it presents (Wulf). The presentation on the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (Sunde) gives an example of how one network of concerned organizations has attempted to positively influence policy developments on small arms management. The reader will also find views of engaged parties

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at an important stage in the work of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, whose study is now complete (Donowaki *et al*).

For the Geneva Forum partners, the publication of this small volume represents a work in progress. As the small arms and light weapons issue has risen up the political agenda, so has the political discussion become more heated and difficult. While there will be many policy arenas—national, regional, and international—in which the debate will take place in the months and years ahead, one of the most visible of these will be the coming UN Conference on the “Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects” in mid-year 2001. Whether or not Geneva emerges as the final venue for this Conference, the rich environment that now exists in Geneva for examination and action on small arms issues will be important to the preparation for this Conference and beyond. The Geneva Forum will continue to play a role in these developments.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his recent *Millennium Report* has summed up well the current state of affairs in relation to tackling problems associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and provides a useful reminder of what the aims of our efforts in this area should be: “The many recent expressions of concern about small arms proliferation are a welcome sign that the importance of the issue is being recognized, but words alone do nothing to prevent the ongoing slaughter of innocent people. Dialogue is critical, but we must match the rhetoric of concern with the substance of practical action.” (*We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century, Millennium Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations*, April 2000).

We wish to thank all those experts who gave their time and energies in contributing to the Geneva Forum seminars summarized here. Responsibility for the representation of the content of these seminars rests with the Geneva Forum partners, rather than with the individual presenters themselves. We also extend our gratitude to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, which provided funding for the organization of these seminars

and for the publication and distribution of this volume. Finally, two individuals deserve special mention. Spyros Demetriou did nearly all the organizational work in making the seminars happen and also wrote the summary reports presented here. Geneviève Boutin has overseen the final production of this volume and its distribution. We are very grateful to them both for their essential contributions.

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