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# Chapter 2

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## African Initiatives on Small Arms Management<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction: The Dynamics

The long shelf life of the tools of violence and the abundance of ammunition dumped in the field over decades have often ensured the continued use of small arms, long after their original political objective has disappeared. In this regard, three sources of weapons should be cited as fueling the illicit trade in arms. First, existing stocks of arms and ammunition, which have always been illicit, frequently feed the illicit arms market. In addition, existing stocks, which were legitimately obtained or owned in the past but have become illicit, also find their way to the illicit arms market. Finally, stocks of new weapons may similarly help to supply the illicit arms trade.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that regional efforts to deal with small arms in Africa have evolved significantly since the information in this chapter was originally presented.

<sup>2</sup> This presentation was given in Ms. Gamba's personal capacity, and the views expressed are solely her own.

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An examination of the dynamics surrounding the proliferation of small arms and light weapons points to at least three significant aggravating factors, which perpetuate the movement and use of these arms and encourage the illicit trade.

First, the pursuit of peace processes that lack a disarmament component promotes small arms proliferation. Peace negotiations that do not aim to remove the weapons from a conflict region can leave an excess of weapons in a fragile post-conflict society, and increase the likelihood that arms from that region will become sources for the illicit trade.

A second factor, which contributes to the continued movement and use of illicit arms, is found in the recent desire in developed countries to rid such countries of unwanted, unused stocks of small arms, light weapons and conventional armament. This trend has particularly emerged in Eastern European countries, where, following the end of the Cold War, a glut of weapons has attracted the attention of illicit arms dealers.

A third factor causing the proliferation of these arms is directly related to the potential for control that most nations have over existing and expanding stocks. Governments often devote insufficient resources to controlling the proliferation of small arms within their territory. Without strong efforts to monitor stocks of new and existing arms, and without international cooperation to this end, the illicit arms trade is left to flourish within a given state's borders.

The effects of an uncontrolled accumulation of illicit small arms are twofold. On the one hand, effects may occur with respect to armed conflict driven by political, ideological, ethnic or religious purposes. On the other hand, effects may be observed in the threats to individual security arising from armed crime. Nevertheless, in most regions, these two types of effects can be viewed as one single continuum of violence, with one effect feeding into the other.

Combat-related fatalities resulting from armed conflict in Africa since the 1950s have totaled 6 million, most of which were

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caused by small arms and light weapons. Perhaps the most striking figure of all is that this type of combat has also caused the permanent displacement of up to 30 million African people.

And yet, though combat-related fatalities are staggering, the fatalities within civilian populations caused directly or indirectly by the use of arms or armed force amount to many more. Among these non-combat fatalities we find people caught between two or more armed groups; populations decimated by terror tactics and armed banditry; populations whose food supply is destroyed or stolen by armed bands; refugees driven on by armed thugs; violent and fatal crime caused by armed groups; individuals attacked and killed by armed criminals in cities and in rural areas; groups who face the challenge of armed cattle rustlers; and people who die because they have been cut off from emergency assistance and relief by the interposition of armed groups. Weapons acquire a dynamic that is much more devastating to individual human security when they are not strictly used for the pursuit of state-oriented political objectives. However, when weapons are utilized against people for motives other than political ones, such arms will most likely have originally entered the region for purposes of supporting state-oriented political goals.

Small arms can be perceived as the decisive tools of internal conflict. When a conflict reaches its peak or end, these tools of violence, if not controlled or destroyed, tend to find their way to other countries or regions where internal conflict is on the rise. The arms are transferred to their new destinations through the illegal trade.

The dynamics of conflict virtually guarantee steady inflows of small arms whenever political interests demand them, for purposes of either commencing conflict or resolving it militarily. But the dynamics of peace do not automatically ensure a steady collection and destruction of accumulated weapons. The failure to control small arms, once peace has taken hold in a conflict region, results from a reluctance to perceive these arms as

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potentially destabilizing in their own right, rather than mere tools for political action. Without arms, the dynamics of conflict cannot be served; however, without arms reduction and control, the dynamics of peace are impeded. Effective policing of arms, even where conflict is absent, is crucial to preventing these weapons from fuelling human, national and regional instability. Because the problem transcends borders, regional cooperation and coordination are thus fundamental.

### **Regional Approaches**

An examination of the methods that different African sub-regions are applying, to deal with the problem of small arms proliferation, highlights the connection between the need to manage the existing problem, reduce it and prevent its recurrence in the future. Let us examine each sub-region and analyze what is happening, in terms of initiatives in place. This exercise is useful because it can assist countries to focus on their immediate needs, and also to identify those areas for operations and cooperation that have not yet been fully developed. Recurrence of the problem can be circumscribed if needs are understood, and if preventive solutions are comprehensive and suitable for the situation at hand.

First, let us consider that the nature of existing sub-regional initiatives indicates which aspects of the problem are perceived as most significant in a given region's approach to small arms proliferation and the illegal trade:

#### Southern African Development Community (SADC) Countries

Here, national initiatives are focused on crime, and are centered on management approaches. Bi-national, tripartite and quadripartite initiatives are focused on weapons removal, and are centered on reduction and resolution of existing problems.

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Regional initiatives are focused on information exchange and cooperation, and concentrate on prevention, but also demonstrate a strong management component in implementing cooperation.

### Eastern Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes Region

National initiatives are based on the need to control crime and borders, and are thus management approaches. Multinational initiatives are focused on the containment of the spillover of war, and on the containment of war itself, and, as such, possess a strong resolution component. These two levels of initiatives feed each other: the multinational initiatives indicate the problem and the national initiatives show a tendency to reduce the impact of the larger problem at a national level. Emphasis is therefore on crime (management), border controls (management) and, when possible, removal (resolution). No prevention package yet exists, but one is now being developed, following the Nairobi Ministerial Initiative, focusing on coordination and legislation (prevention).

### West and Central Africa

National initiatives focus on removal and, therefore, constitute a resolution approach. Multinational/regional initiatives focus on emergency containment; an example is the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) Moratorium. Multinational/regional initiatives also focus on conflict management, an example being the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX). Multinational/regional initiatives are centered on emergency management issues. No prevention package is yet present.

Progress on these initiatives depends upon the degree to which they are supported by robust implementation structures.

Next, an analysis of specific sub-regional initiatives that are already in place helps us to understand the dynamics and trends

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associated with attempts to deal with the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons:

### The SADC Process

The main elements of the SADC process are a series of initiatives, representing a three-tiered approach to regional action, based on enhancement of both national and regional legislation (prevention); enhancement of operational capacity for national and regional action (management); and removal of surplus, illicit weapons, and reduction of local demand by creating education campaigns (resolution). The initiatives – the SADC Action Programme on small arms; the SADC Draft Protocol on Firearms and Ammunition and its Implementation Package; and the EU-SADC programme on illicit small arms trafficking control – are interconnected, but remain unique. Each initiative possesses elements that define prevention, management and resolution measures in the long, medium and short-term, yet each functions slightly differently from the next. Each of the SADC initiatives respects the model of prevention, management and resolution. All of these initiatives are bound by legal frameworks, and defined by research.

Four types of actions are foreseen through these initiatives: research, operations, capacity building and education/development.

### Eastern Africa, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa

The initiatives underway in this region are manifold. The Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Committee (EAPCCO) is organizing regional coordination and research in support of cross-border activities and the sharing of information; the focus is on controlling illicit arms (management). EAPCCO is also at the head of an NGO-governmental collaboration aiming to construct a plan

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of action for the region, in close association with the Nairobi Ministerial Initiative.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is beginning to look at a range of issues connected to the resolution of the problem, including removal programs, education and socio-economic development. The East African Community (EAC) has concentrated on tightening legislation and legal frameworks for cooperative action on arms control (management).

The United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNIAFRI) researches and examines initiatives. The newly signed Nairobi Ministerial Initiative has looked to bring together ten countries, with different associations but common problems, towards the establishment of a coordinated approach focusing on legislation and exchange of information (prevention and management issues); the most important mission of this initiative is to construct a plan for regional action, a process which is now underway through consultation with other organizations and civil society in the region. Each of these initiatives has nuances of its own.

### West Africa and Central Africa

Within West Africa, the Mali Initiative focuses on arms removal (“Flame of Peace”) and on education. These facets make it a resolution-oriented initiative.

The ECOWAS Moratorium focuses on the temporary freeze on manufacture and transfer of arms. It is an emergency prevention approach that aspires to establish future long-term prevention capacity. The creation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED), and adoption of its more comprehensive plan for future action, might help this initiative provide more long-term effects.

COPAX focuses on structures for exchange of information on conflict management and could, as such, be further developed

into a management and prevention mechanism with a focus on arms.

The Quadripartite Agreement in West Africa focuses on illegal immigrants, border crime and illicit entries that impact four countries in the region. It has been operational for decades, and has the potential for a firearms focus that might act as the core for a regional management initiative.

Finally, the secretariats of the West African Regional Police Chiefs Conference (WARPCCO) and the Central African Regional Police Chiefs Conference (CARPCCO) are beginning to look at firearms control, and at the dynamics of illicit small arms trafficking, as well as the need to contain and reduce transnational organized crime. These two organizations approach the issues from a police perspective. Coordination and cooperation, between these international police bodies and developmental and other agencies in the region that focus on arms, has not yet occurred.

## Conclusion

By examining the dynamics of the small arms problem in Africa, and its connection with the need to contain and reduce the illicit arms trade in all its aspects, and by looking at the types of national, regional and other initiatives that different groups of nations have initiated, we may conclude that, in the least, all regions recognize that the problem is affecting their national security, and that regional approaches can be utilized to minimize national concerns. It is also clear that different regions' focuses for action are divergent and seldom comprehensive. A country or region might favor short-term resolution items, or may pursue longer-term prevention packages. Some countries or regions do not adequately address ongoing management needs in their respective packages. At the same time, all regional packages incorporate a combination of all three types of measures: short,

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medium and long-term. Additionally, all initiatives have a regional component of some kind attached.

It is fitting to suggest that a comprehensive African approach, that takes into account all the trends and needs of African regions, as expressed in their actual behavior, must be developed. I hope that the Organization of African Unity (OAU), at its Ministerial Meeting to be held in Bamako in early December 2000, might see fit to develop this comprehensive approach, utilizing the strengths and experiences of all sub-regional initiatives in Africa.