

On the interrelation between Armed Violence and Development

The Netherlands is of the opinion that a strong relationship exists between underdevelopment and armed violence. Within this context armed violence is understood as '*the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community, or state, that undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development*¹.' The presence of large quantities of arms in societies, especially in fragile states or other 'under-governed' areas, may cause slumbering social tensions to spiral out of control and fuel all kinds of conflict. Crime and gang-related violence, may take on a much more violent tone, as can the government response to it. Marginalized groups find it easier to empower themselves for armed conflict and the black market is more likely to grow under these circumstances, further empowering criminal elements in society. All this means that the government monopoly on violence is further eroded. It also leads to increases in security spending, thereby pressing on the general budget. This doesn't even mention the human suffering caused by armed violence: conservative estimates suggest that annually, 740.000 people lose their lives from either direct armed violence, or the indirect effects of conflict, such as malnutrition and disease. Moreover, the lack of security sets back the conditions for sustainable development. Armed violence causes widespread macro-economic instability, decreases in foreign investment and a reallocation of development assistance. Civil conflict decreases a country's GDP growth with 2 to 20% a year. The international community pays a direct price: the 'global cost of insecurity' has been estimated at up to \$ 70,- per person, or \$ 400 bln. a year.

Addressing the issue of armed violence therefore means more than just addressing the supply side of arms (through sanctions and legislation), it very much means addressing the *demand* side as well, thereby focussing on the root causes of violence, instead of its symptoms. People want guns to protect themselves where the state is unable to do so, or to make a living for themselves in brutally hard circumstances. The existence of a 'gun culture' or the cultural acceptance of armed combat as a means to settle disputes may also be an important factor. The international dialogue on armed violence must be pursued. States may find this a sensitive subject, as it also deals with state violence against segments of its population, transgressions of humanitarian law, high-level corruption and the size of the defence budget. Where the state is not capable or willing to target armed violence though, a state-centred approach (through trade sanctions, moratoria, embargoes and declarations) will not yield the necessary results. It is therefore necessary to complement this approach with a more bottom-up, community view of insecurity and institutional responsiveness, and a strong focus on *human security*. As the OECD's work on an Armed Violence Reduction Lens points out, it is necessary to identify context-specific *risk and resilience factors*: what factors (at individual, family, community, or societal level) contribute to increasing the likelihood that an individual will commit a violent act or become a victim of a violent attack? Programmes should target (1) the actor who commits the act of violence, (2) the instrument used in perpetrating the act and (3) the environment in which violence takes place: a holistic view of countering armed violence. In practice, this means not only reducing the surplus of arms; destroying weapons after demobilization programmes and regulating civilian possession of arms. It also means working with communities to counter crime and domestic or political violence at a local level, for instance through community policing. A context specific approach and well documented research is essential in this approach, as well is the involvement of both the governmental as the civil society channels to work with.

¹ *The global burden of armed conflict*, Geneva Declaration