



Fact sheet 1

Facts on Illegal Small Arms

Illegal small arms are routinely used by criminals and drug dealers, or by warlords and child soldiers in war-torn countries, even under arms embargoes. Due to their illegal nature, statistics on the trade and use of illegal small arms are rare and not always reliable. The following are general statistics that indicate the magnitude of the consequences of illegal small arms and light weapons.

- ◆ According to the Small Arms Survey (an independent research project at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland), about **25%** of the **\$4 billion** annual global trade in small arms is “illicit” or not recorded as required by law.
- ◆ In Colombia: **1 in 10** deaths is caused by firearms; **93%** of the victims are men. **80%** of all homicides in the country are committed with firearms. The country has recorded **700,000** registered firearms and estimates that **2.4 million** illegal guns are in circulation. Between 1979 and 2005 more than **475,000** people were killed by the use of firearms through crime – organized and petty – and the ongoing conflict. (Source: Conflict Analysis Resource Centre, Colombia, press release, 5 April 2006).
- ◆ **80%** of the guns used in crime in Mexico originate from outside the country (Source: Small Arms/Firearms Education and Research Network). **50%** of the guns used in crime in Canada were smuggled into the country (Source: Canadian Professional Police Association). Legally-owned guns can end up in the hands of criminals: in Brazil for example, a government study in Rio de Janeiro found that **72%** of the guns used in crimes had at one time been legally registered. (Source: Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2005).
- ◆ Small arms and light weapons are responsible for the majority—between **60** and **90%**, depending on the conflict—of direct conflict deaths, of which there were between **80,000** and **108,000** worldwide in 2003. (Source: *Small Arms Survey 2005*)
- ◆ Contemporary conflicts also cause a possibly larger but unquantifiable number of indirect deaths due to conflict-related social disruption, which leads to malnutrition and deaths from preventable diseases. Research shows that small arms also play an important role in these deaths, by restricting the access of humanitarian and relief organizations to vulnerable populations. (Source: *Small Arms Survey 2005*). For instance, according to the British medical journal *The Lancet* (January 2006) and the International Rescue Committee, **3.9 million** people have died as a result of the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998.
- ◆ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than **17,000** children have been removed from armed groups (as of May 2006). UNICEF and its partners supported the demobilization and care of **11,361** of those children, **14%** of whom were girls. Of these, **8,646** were reunited with

their families and reintegrated into their communities. (Source: Protection Section/UNICEF Kinshasa, as of May 31, 2006)

- ◆ The Monitoring Group on Somalia reported (S/2005/153) that approximately **10,000** tons of charcoal were being illegally exported from Somalia every month in order to finance the mobilization of militias and to purchase arms. (Source: *Report of the UN Secretary-General on small arms*, 17 February 2006)
- ◆ At least **200,000** non-conflict-related firearms deaths occur each year, worldwide. These include homicide, suicide, and unintentional shooting deaths. Globally, firearms are used in **6%** of suicides and in almost **40%** of homicides. (Source: *Small Arms Survey 2004*)
- ◆ As of June 2005, legislative controls over illegal arms brokers existed in only **32** of the United Nations' **191** States. (Patrick Mc Carthy, "Scratching the surface of a global scourge: the first five years of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms," *Disarmament Forum*, No. 1, 2006, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research)

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