

# LIGHT WEAPONS AND MICRO-DISARMAMENT

## INTRODUCTION

The demise of the Cold War and an increasing awareness of intrastate conflict, largely ethnic in nature, has focused attention on an area of arms control hitherto little explored: namely micro-disarmament as it applies to light weapons. Realization that light weapons are the primary tools in generating human casualties -- military and para-military (state); quasi-military (insurgent) and civilian -- has been recognized for some time. Until recently international arms control studies and efforts have centered almost exclusively on weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and large conventional weapons systems such as tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and the like.

The United Nations (UN), some individual governments, non-governmental research organizations and academia began to focus increased attention on several of the issues surrounding intrastate warfare, crime and light weapon proliferation early in the 1990s. Probably the first significant international impetus to more seriously address the issue was in January 1995 when the Secretary-General to the Security Council of the United Nations in a report entitled *An Agenda for Peace* stressed the need for "practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts that the United Nations is actually dealing with and of the weapons, most of them light weapons, that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands."<sup>1</sup> It was within this context that the term micro-disarmament was first coined. For the purposes of this report, micro-disarmament will be understood to mean the collection and subsequent disposal of light weapons, normally through destruction, used in internal political conflict. This would not necessarily exclude the inclusion of ceilings on light weapons holdings nor the application of micro-disarmament to interstate conflict.

While the problems associated with light weapons in conflict situations were self-evident, practical solutions were not so readily apparent due to a variety of factors:

- the complexity of the matter;
- jurisdictional issues;
- definitional problems;
- the blurring of international, regional, national, sub-national and transnational domains;
- the vast number of suppliers and weapons; and
- a lack of information and research.

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<sup>1</sup> Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN*. UN General Assembly Document . A/50/60-S/1995/1, 25 January, 1995