

Innumerable non-state groups operating at the sub-state or transnational levels are the primary sources of illicit demand for and use of small weapons. These groups are either criminally or politically motivated. Some such groups acquire small arms for self-defence against governments who use the same arms to repress political opposition. In essence, small arms are used by non-state actors to carry out violence in pursuit of criminal or political objectives.

Small arms are produced by arms-manufacturing firms located across 70 countries.

Standardised regulation of licit transfers do not exist nor are there transparency mechanisms in place to monitor a post-transfer inventory or catalogue of small arms. Likewise, there is no international registry of small arms in place.

Efforts to reach agreement on the issue are hampered to varying degrees by the following:

- A minimalist approach to the issue is favoured by certain governments who do not want their conduct of foreign policy unreasonably constrained. Such states seek to retain the capacity to export small arms wherever and whenever necessary in order to pursue their national interests and would oppose excessive controls and regulation of small arms exports.
- There is also strong opposition among certain governments to making the transfer process of small arms more transparent and to the establishment of an international small arms registry due to the interests of powerful domestic constituencies.
- There is disagreement among governments on the extent to which the issue should be framed as a human rights issue.
- The large number of states in which arms-manufacturers are situated complicates the development of consensus for supply-targeted initiatives.
- Controlling the legal transfer of small arms is difficult, given the variations of domestic legislation in place regarding import and export permits and documentation.
- A significant discrepancy exists between the North and South regarding how the small arms issue is to be framed, as was particularly evident at the UN Panel of Experts. For instance, the North allocates equal responsibility to both suppliers and clients while the South views the issue as supply-driven. Consequently, the establishment of a basic starting point to deal with the issue is affected.
- The amount of resources and type of capacity required to implement a small arms initiative are undetermined.
- NGOs such as the NRA are expected to oppose a small arms initiative and to be active globally and domestically in influencing government positions if the issue is not properly and accurately defined with a law enforcement component, thereby allowing the lobby to misrepresent the issue as the disarming of civilians and removal of their right to self-protection.

II. SELECTIVE RESPONSES AND INITIATIVES

A. Individual Initiatives

1. Canada

The Canadian Peacebuilding Initiative managed by CIDA already carries out activities in line with disarmament such as supporting the demobilisation of child soldiers, the reintegration of former