

One of the purposes of the Ottawa Group meeting was to raise questions that challenge the assumptions and views that governments have regarding non-state actors. Ninety per cent of most conflicts since World War II have been intra-state, a fact that seems to be consciously neglected by governments currently creating norms to regulate the movement of SALW. Governments must realise that conflicts continue to occur when one party is a non-state actor and such conflicts cannot be dismissed. Communication with non-state actors as well as with states must be part of normal processes in addressing the SALW issue.

Current advocacy and activity on and around the subject of SALW contains an implicit assumption that non-state actors, in any given situation, lack legitimacy and just cause. This is not always the case. There are many instances where the state lacks legitimacy, commits violence against innocent people and abuses human rights and civil liberties. There are cases when violent acts against the state can be considered acceptable. The Ottawa Group does not agree that state actors are always 'legitimate' actors and non-state actors are always the opposite.

2. Definition of Non-State Actors

- *What is the definition of non-state actors?*
- *What is excluded from this definition rather than what is included?*
- *How do governments define non-state actors?*
- *Does the term non-state actors only apply to political actors?*
- *Do we include brokers and traders as non-state actors?*
- *What about civilian possession of SALW?*
- *What about private security and private military corporations?*
- *What defines a legitimate versus an illegitimate armed opposition group?*

The Ottawa Group does not have answers to these questions.

However, neither do those who are responsible for moving this issue forward. Nor have governments answered these questions clearly. Some complexities around this issue need to be clarified.

Defining non-state actors as anything specified as a non-state entity is problematic because it creates a very large and diverse group with which to deal. It may be necessary to define non-state actors as separate groups when addressing specific issues, i.e. that some contexts may create different terms for a non-state actor (one person's 'terrorist' is another's 'freedom fighter'). The legitimacy versus illegitimacy of an armed opposition group may also vary depending upon that for which they are fighting and the nature of the force they oppose. For instance, the inclusion of militias and warlords under the non-state actor category could vary according to the issue. Much of the definition also varies according to not only what the issue is but also which processes and mechanisms are being used to address any given issue.

3. What are the Factors Contributing to the Demand of SALW by Non-State Actors?

- *Is there a problem with governments restricting non-state actors' access to SALW?*