

B. Criminal Component

The criminal component of the small arms issue arises from the nature of certain small arms consumers and from specific aspects of their transfer. In simple terms, concern with the criminal component can be summarised as the wrong weapons in the wrong hands. First, small arms are preferred weapons among criminal actors such as drug-traffickers and terrorists. Second, domestic legislation of several states that prohibit the non-military possession of military-style weapons is not enforced. Third, a portion of the trafficking is carried out illicitly and outside of established and government-regulated processes. Fourth, small arms that are licitly transferred to the military are commonly sold to criminal actors or other civilians by corrupt military personnel who are motivated by profit or political ambitions. In essence, small arms have become a prevalent commodity of illicit trafficking given their popularity among criminal actors such as drug-traffickers and terrorists.

C. Security Component

Areas of potential or actual conflict attract higher levels of arms, both illicit and licit, which destabilises an already precarious situation, escalates the conflict and hampers efforts to manage and settle the conflict. These conflicts are more often intra-state, rather than inter-state, thus, changing the character of the focus immediately as it is associated with an internal breakdown of law and order. If the conflict reaches settlement, the small arms often remain in the hands of non-military personnel, are transferred across borders to other hot-spots for profit, or fall into the hands of criminal actors. While the arms continue to circulate, efforts to build peace in a post-conflict environment are seriously challenged and undermined, increasing the likelihood of continued instability.

D. Additional Areas of Concern

The criminal and security components of the small arms issue are inter-linked with each other as well as with good governance and development. This inter-linkage complicates the task of precisely defining the issue, as well as identifying the specific relationship and overlap of small arms as a security/arms control issue and a illicit firearms trafficking issue. It also impacts on efforts to determine what is relevant and the key priority.

The issue encompasses small arms that currently exist and in circulation in addition to small arms that are not yet manufactured.

The export and import of small arms in many countries is controlled not by civilians but by the military.

While the issue of small arms is certainly global in its scope, primary concern lies with those regions that are recent witnesses to conflict. These include Latin/Central America, Central Africa, Southern Africa, the Balkans and South Asia. Affected states in these regions also lack sufficient capacity and resources to legislate laws (current and future) regarding small arms let alone enforce them. At the same time, each of these regions demonstrates its own unique character with respect to the small arms issue. For instance, South Asia is both a source of small arms supply as well as demand. Both South Asia and Central Africa have witnessed intra- as well as inter-state conflict. Central Africa suffers immeasurably from the constant unregulated flow of armed, organised groups across state borders. However, all of the regions in their own way are experiencing the detrimental consequences of small arms on peacebuilding efforts in which Canada is playing one role or another.

Governments with poor human rights records are among the abusers of small arms, as their forces use these weapons and force to kill and repress civilians.