

TRENDS IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW) DEVELOPMENT: NON-PROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL DIMENSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) as a non-proliferation and arms control issue and a domestic security and safety issue have been the topic of much discussion over the past several years. It has been addressed in numerous fora ranging across a wide spectrum of agendas and concerns.¹ The challenge of controlling “the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer”² of SALW is being examined by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both domestically and within international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the European Union (EU). It is of particular concern for international NGOs who deal with the outcome of SALW misuse either directly or indirectly within a humanitarian perspective, mostly but not exclusively in less developed states. It is an issue that may take years to successfully redress. As well, the consideration of firearms³ as a criminal and public health (primarily suicide and accident) concern is an issue that many governments are grappling with, particularly in developed countries. This matter has frequently

¹ There are many sources that provide information on the arms control and humanitarian issues concerning SALW. For details see “Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). *Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Annotated Bibliography, Update 1996-1998*. Ottawa, September 1998; Canada, DFAIT. *Light Weapons and Micro-Disarmament*. Ottawa, January 1997. Both these publications refer to some 200 reports and studies. Following are some of the Internet Web Sites containing ongoing updates on the issue: www.prepcom.org; www.basicint.org; and www.bicc.uni-bonn. These sites also provide links to other sites dealing with the issue. The term “SALW issues and/or concerns” will be used in this paper in its broadest sense. The problem with defining the “issue” is that it is many issues. These issues have differing priorities and are not always perceived in the same way by the various stakeholders both government and NGOs.

² This phrase is best associated with UNGA Resolution 50/70B which mandated the formation of a “Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms” to investigate and make recommendations concerning SALW within the context of conflict, particularly that being dealt with by the UN. The UN Panel tabled 24 recommendations for addressing various SALW issues. See United Nations. *Report of UN Panel of Experts on Small Arms A/52/298* (27 August 1997).

³ The term **firearms** means any barreled weapon which expels a bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive - this would include light weapons, small arms, personal protection arms and sporting arms. The term **small arms** will be arbitrarily used in this paper to mean personal firearms primarily designed for military and security force operations, usually automatic and/or semi-automatic (self loading) with a large capacity magazine (usually 10 or more rounds). The term light weapons includes small arms plus most other military weapons between a 12.7 mm and a 100 mm barrel as well as grenades and other explosive warheads of various design including their launchers. This explanation leaves handguns, particularly some semi-automatic pistols somewhat in limbo for definition purposes. The focus of this paper is on small arms and light weapons (SALW). Small arms as defined herein are not legally available for civilian use in Canada and many other states.