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**Inter-Departmental Meeting on a
Canadian Initiative to Deal with Small Arms**

6 November 1997

Rapporteur's Report

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SUMMARY

The issue of small arms is multifaceted and complex, straddling as it does criminal and security concerns. Efforts to deal with the issue are hampered by the complexity of the issue in addition to intra-state, state, regional and inter-state considerations. Nonetheless, initiatives on the small arms issue have been pursued to varying degrees of accomplishment. Opportunity exists for the launch of a Canadian contribution to fill the gaps that yet remain.

INTRODUCTION

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 1997, the Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated a need to attend to cross-cutting issues as part of a larger effort to contend with intra-state conflict and the development of human security. The Minister identified small arms as one such issue deserving of greater focus and a more prevalent Canadian contribution. Representatives from the Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Defence, Justice, the RCMP and the Canadian International Development Agency met to discuss the status of and current responses to the small arms issue as well as to identify areas for further initiatives, obstacles and policy options. This report summarises these discussions.

I. FRAMING THE ISSUE

The complexity and breadth of the small arms issue are well-appreciated. The issue has received considerable attention in policy-oriented think-pieces and is more often discussed in inter-governmental, non-governmental and academic circles. Several elements of the issue that stem from these dialogues need to be emphasised and considered in the process of developing a Canadian initiative.

A. Definition

While there is no agreement on what small arms precisely entail, there is a basic level of understanding of small arms as those weapons ranging from shot-guns to mortars and including semi-automatics, fully-automatics, heavy machine guns and rocket-launchers. Included in this range are weapons with a strong dual-use capacity in both non-military and military situations. For law enforcement purposes, small arms are commonly referred to as "firearms." The United Nations has developed an inventory of weapons considered small arms as has the Wassenaar Arrangement and the OAS Convention. The size of ammunition is also an important consideration of what is considered to be a small arm.

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