

# THE ROLE OF AMMUNITION CONTROLS IN ADDRESSING EXCESSIVE AND DESTABILIZING ACCUMULATIONS OF SMALL ARMS.

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of "excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer" or "the "misuse of" <sup>1</sup> military light weapons, particularly small arms<sup>2</sup> from both an arms control and humanitarian perspective has been a subject of discussion within relevant government, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and academic circles for several years.<sup>3</sup> The focus has been almost exclusively on the weapon as a tool of violence, particularly within the context of conflict and post-conflict societies where destabilizing surpluses of military light weapons have led to increased violence often driven by economic, social, ethnic and political disparities. Some regions where this affliction has been particularly lethal are Central America and Southern Africa within a post-conflict scenario, and Central Africa and Afghanistan within an on-going scenario.

The issue moved the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to adopt Resolution 50/70B entitled "Small Arms". It mandated the formation of a "Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms" to investigate and prepare a report on:

- the type of small arms and light weapons actually being used in conflicts being dealt with by the UN;
- the nature and causes of the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons, including their illicit production and trade; and
- the ways and means to prevent and reduce the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons, in particular as they cause or exacerbate conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer" focuses on the issue of light weapons and small arms in accordance with UNGA Resolution 50/70B. The term "misuse" is an attempt to capture one of the more politically sensitive and complex issues involved in the whole aspect of light weapons as an arms control concern, that is, the state as a perpetrator of violence and the creator of casualties using small arms and light weapons.

<sup>2</sup> The term "small arms" will be 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 (10 rounds but usually 20 to 30). The term "light weapons" includes small arms plus most other military weapons below a 100 mm barrel as well as grenades of various design. 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 and sporting arms. The focus of this paper is on small arms. Small arms as defined herein are not legally available for civilians in Canada.

<sup>3</sup> For details on the issue see "Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). *Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Annotated Bibliography*. Ottawa, November 1996; Canada, DFAIT. *Light Weapons and Micro-Disarmament*. Ottawa, January 1997. Both these publications refer to over 80 various studies.