

THE BRITISH AMERICAN SECURITY INFORMATION COUNCIL

AMERICAS REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FIREARM REGULATION FOR THE PURPOSES OF CRIME PREVENTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY SAO PAULO, BRAZIL, 8-12 DECEMBER 1997

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I would like to thank the Verification Technology Information Centre, VERTIC, for sponsoring my attendance at this workshop. The statement that I submit for your consideration does not necessarily reflect the views of VERTIC as it is the product of research and analysis undertaken by the British American Security Information Council, BASIC, an independent research organisation which analyses international security issues. The recommendations I will outline are the result of ongoing research by BASIC's Project on Light Weapons which is designed to evaluate the role of light weapons¹ and small arms in international, regional and national security.

BACKGROUND

The premise of BASIC's recommendations is that the proliferation of light weapons, both in conflicts and civil society, is a pervasive and continuing problem. Firearms control is an integral part of international arms control. The internationalisation of the gun trade enables gun control measures in one country to affect the levels of gun-related crime and violence in other countries. For example, the United States government's laissez faire approach to the gun trade both within and beyond U.S. borders has led to the influx of thousands of cheap Brazilian handguns and Chinese assault rifles and the export of U.S. firearms to drug traffickers in regions of conflict.

Just as the absence of domestic controls undermine international restraint efforts, the presence of domestic controls may increase the likelihood of successful international restraint efforts. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to control the illicit international market in light weapons without also monitoring and controlling domestic access to weapons.

BASIC acknowledges the substantial efforts of the UN Disarmament Commission, the UN Panel of Experts on Small Arms and the ECOSOC Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice to raise the profile of light weapons proliferation. We welcome the recommendations of the ECOSOC Resolution of 9 May 1997 on Measures to Regulate Firearms.

¹ The working definition used by BASIC's Project on Light Weapons defines light weapons as including pistols and revolvers, rifles, machine guns, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, mortars up to 100mm, associated ammunition, and anti-personnel mines. Major conventional weapons are understood to include: tanks, airplanes, ships, helicopters, mortars 100mm or over, artillery, anti-armour mines, armored personnel carriers, and non-portable missiles and missile launchers.