

PART ONE - DISCUSSION

GENERAL

The term "small arms and light weapons" (shortened to "light weapons" throughout this report) is used for convenience in this report to encompass the spectrum of small arms and those weapons of heavier calibre which are designed primarily for military purposes. It generally excludes firearms which are not exclusively designed for military usage. It excludes larger weapons which are covered under the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (for example, tanks and aircraft). Some of the weapons included may need to be operated by more than one person and versions may sometimes be towed or vehicle-mounted (air, land and sea). Anti-personnel land mines are not covered in this paper in view of the Ottawa Agreement and subsequent Treaty signed in December 1997. If, however, that Treaty were to fail or be ignored, there could be scope to include such a munition in a light weapons register. Anti-vehicle land mines are included within the scope of the model outlined here.

A register is not an instrument intended to control arms, in and of itself. It is a tool to promote transparency which can build greater confidence among participants, perhaps as part of a larger arms control and disarmament regime. In order to design a register properly, one must bear in mind the basic reason for such a mechanism. The purpose of an arms register of any sort is, quite simply, to increase the transparency of the production, existence, and/or movement of military arms and munitions. The expectation is that this transparency will build confidence among the participants and provide valuable information for consultations and further actions to reduce tensions or prevent threatening situations. In other words, transparency is one tool used in an attempt to promote international and domestic peace and security.

Among participants a register may increase the confidence level with a view to reducing international tensions. This is the aim of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. Some lessons may also be drawn from other treaties and agreements. The Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Vienna Document of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) encompass transparency as a basic tenet of their operation, although they approach the desired result in slightly different ways.⁹ The CFE Treaty is based upon agreed ceiling limitations for the holdings of certain weapons systems. This is probably not necessary (if, indeed, it is even practical) in the sphere of small arms and light weapons. The Vienna Document is more of a confidence-building agreement in which the participant states use a number of methods, including exchanges of information, to increase transparency among themselves about their motives and actions.

In addition to addressing international tensions, greater transparency about light weapons flows and production should assist the international community and individual governments in addressing destabilizing conflicts within countries. Effective policy action, whether at the international or domestic level, is premised on accurate information. To the extent that a register contributes such information, it will help policy makers.