

PREFACE

Canada shares the view articulated in 1995 by the United Nations Secretary General that there is an urgent need for practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts with which the United Nations is actually dealing and with the weapons -- especially small arms and light weapons -- that are actually killing thousands of people each year¹. This is an important subject that has received relatively little attention until recent years.

Two recent initiatives by the United Nations General Assembly bear special mention in this context. The first is the establishment by Resolution 50/70 B of an United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms. This Panel, which is to report to the General Assembly in the autumn of 1997, is examining the types of small arms and light weapons that are actually being used in conflicts with which the United Nations deals, the nature and causes of excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers of such weapons, and the ways that such excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers can be prevented and reduced. The Panel constitutes an important opportunity to explore these issues and to determine a set of practical measures to address these concerns.

The work of the Small Arms Panel will have direct relevance to the second initiative in the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) which seeks to explore a comprehensive approach towards certain practical disarmament measures for the maintenance and consolidation of peace and security, especially in areas that have suffered from conflict. Following from General Assembly Resolution 51/45 N, the Disarmament Commission's work stresses the importance of such practical disarmament as a basis for effective rehabilitation and social and economic development.

Canada is a strong supporter of both these initiatives and has also taken the lead in international efforts to achieve a global ban on anti-personnel landmines. It is critical, particularly to the success of peacebuilding in post-conflict environments, to address the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the former combatants. Effective programmes in this regard have several benefits:

- they reduce the chances of renewed hostilities at the same level of violence and destruction;
- they help preclude the use in criminal activities of left-over military-style weapons and the social and economic disruption that can flow from such activities;

¹ "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations", A/50/60, 3 January 1995.