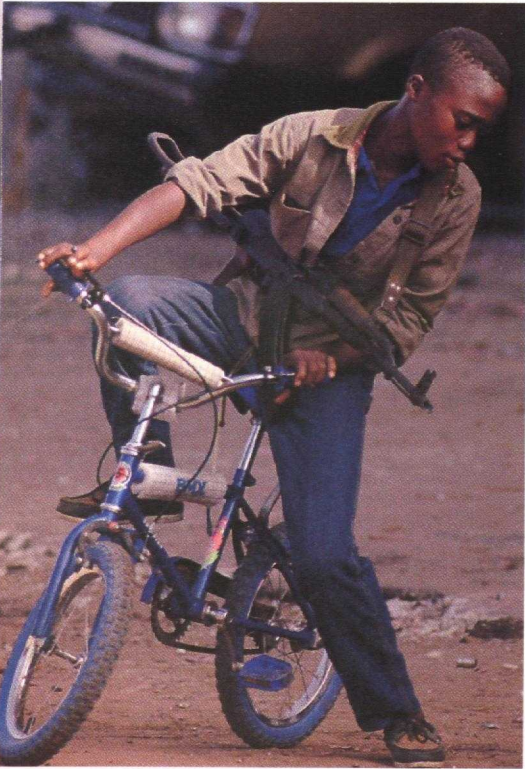


# human security

# Conflict prevention

Strengthening the capacity of the international community to prevent and resolve violent conflicts

CP/AP (David Guttenfelder)



*A young Liberian with his assault rifle in Monrovia, Liberia. (1996)*

## Small arms and light weapons

■ Small arms, the weapons of choice in contemporary armed conflict, kill hundreds of thousands of people each year, the majority of whom are civilians. More than 630 million such weapons are estimated to be currently circulating. In areas of potential or ongoing armed conflict, the uncontrolled spread of small arms exacerbates violence, undermines peacebuilding and hampers socio-economic development.

■ Canada's approach to the problem of small arms focusses on three interlocking tracks: arms control, crime control and peacebuilding. Our overarching goal is to make people and their communities safer from gun violence. The July 2001 United Nations conference on small arms, which recognized the detrimental effects of small arms on people's safety and on their livelihoods, was an important step in realizing this objective. However, some key elements were not given sufficient attention in the resulting Programme of Action, including the legal trade in small arms, the need for strict adherence to international human rights and humanitarian law, and the importance of reducing demand in addition to controlling supply. Progress to date has been most impressive at a regional and sub-regional level, particularly in the Americas, Europe, and East, West and Southern Africa. Canada has supported a series of regional meetings in preparation for, and as follow-up to, the UN Conference. Canada has also supported weapons collection and destruction activities in Albania through NATO, in Moldova through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and in the Balkans and Niger through the United Nations Development Programme.

■ Priority must be given to the full implementation of the UN Programme of Action to ensure tangible progress by 2006, when the international community meets to review its achievements. Canada will continue to work actively with like-minded partners to advance a people-centred approach to the small arms issue by addressing issues such as security sector reform, small arms and public health, civilian possession and criteria for small arms transfers.

## Putting children first: Addressing the impact of small arms on children

To advance a people-centred approach to small arms, Canada's Human Security Program supported a study entitled *Putting Children First*, developed by the UK-based Biting the Bullet initiative. The study focussed on the impact of small arms on children, highlighting the importance of child-sensitive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. It demonstrated the link between small arms and gender-based violence and called for international action to address the specific needs of child soldiers. Launched during the 2001 UN Conference, the study is available on-line at: [www.international-alert.org/publications.htm](http://www.international-alert.org/publications.htm).