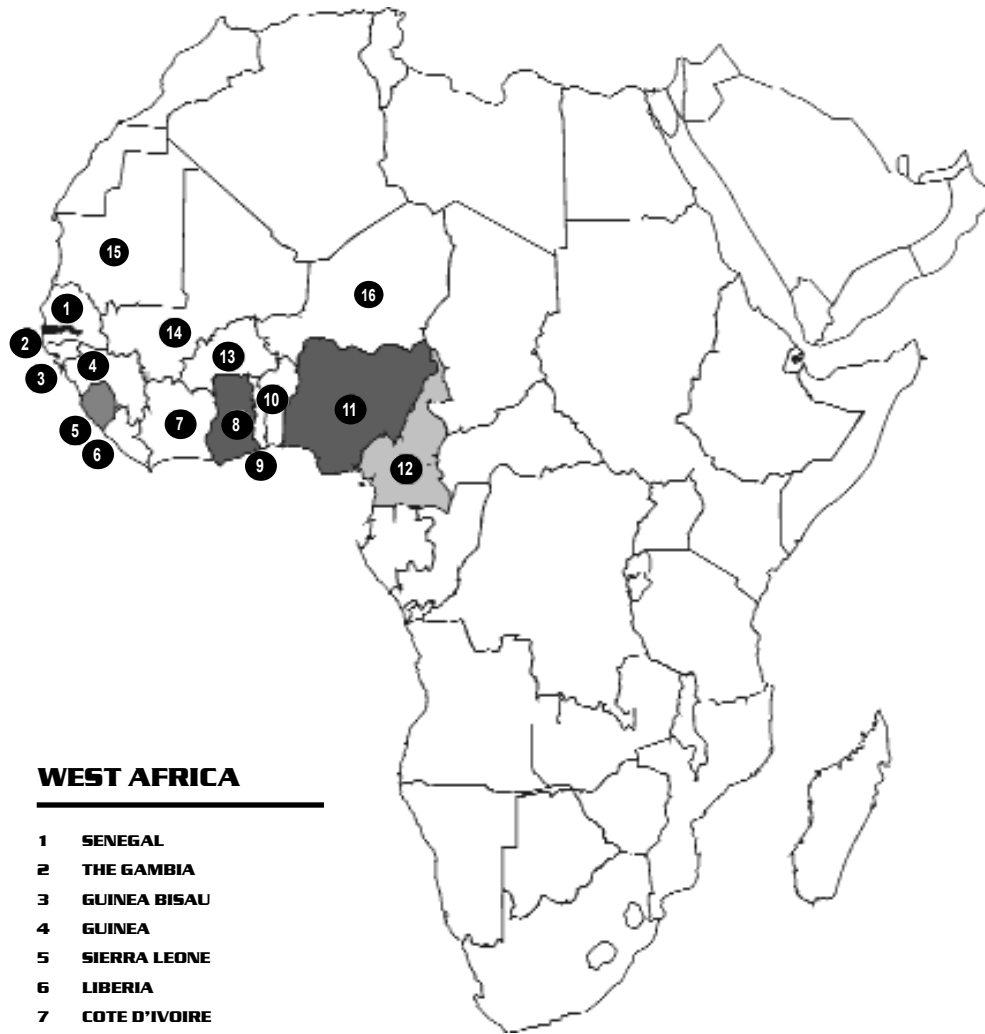## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: FRAGILE DEMOCRACIES & THE CRISIS OF LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

WEST AFRICA

1	SENEGAL
2	THE GAMBIA
3	GUINEA BISAU
4	GUINEA
5	SIERRA LEONE
6	LIBERIA
7	COTE D'IVOIRE
8	GHANA
9	TOGO
10	BENIN
11	NIGERIA
12	CAMEROON
13	BURKINA FASO
14	MALI
15	MAURITANIA
16	NIGER

Abdel-Fatau Musah

Small Arms and Conflict Transormation in West Africa

The activities of people who perform military duty for gain are sufficiently controversial and potentially destructive to warrant close attention – even regulation – by democratic government

Kader Asmal, *Chair of the South African Parliamentary National Conventional Arms Control Committee (1999)*

Small arms management has shaped the evolution of governance and development in the West African sub-region since independence. Seen through the prism of small arms in society, the conflict history of West Africa can be delineated into three epochs – the *Era of the Civil-Military Elite* (circa 1960 – 1980); the *Era of the Junior Militariat* (1980 – 1989); and the *Era of Civil Wars* (1989 to the present). Through these periods, the preference for regime and client security over inclusive and empowering politics has led to unaccountable governance and violent political repression. Even rudimentary health, food and educational needs have been denied the populations. Where attempts have been made to meet these needs, they have been sporadic and meagre because of resource diversion and misappropriation. They have also been selective, supplied on the basis of loyalty to the regime. Minorities and opponents of regimes have been deprived of their civil rights through repressive legislation. As a result, poverty has become endemic and the space for self-expression constricted, making violence an attractive means of forcing national negotiation processes.

This chapter attempts to analyse the place and role of light weapons, particularly small arms, in the transformation of conflicts in West Africa. In doing so, it is necessary to point out the double-edged impact of small arms on power reconfiguration in the region. On one hand, small arms have invariably served as the cover for governments in the perpetration of gross human rights violations. On the other, the loss of state monopoly over small arms in the last decade has empowered internal constituencies in the region to challenge governments in ways unthinkable in the past.

I. Small arms management in West Africa: brief overview

Era of the Civil-Military Elite

Between 1960 and 1980, the State in West Africa unleashed systemic violence on opponents and ordinary people as a means of controlling and projecting power, and with it, a distributive monopoly over national wealth. The custody of the State and, by implication, the instruments of violence, resided in three archetypal forms of government:

1. The authoritarian, usually civilian as in Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Liberia and Senegal at various times;
2. The dictatorial, mainly military as in Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo;
3. A hybrid of the two above, as was invariably practised in the Commonwealth states of Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

A grey area existed between any two of the three forms of governance and at any one time, characteristics of all three could be discerned in any one type. With the notable exception of the Biafran secessionist war in Nigeria and the liberation war in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa was considered the most peaceful region of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. The transition from colonial rule to independence was generally non-violent, perhaps because climatic conditions and malaria prevented the entrenchment of non-African settler communities. Colonial powers withdrew under minimal, mainly peaceful, pressure from nationalists.

West Africa thus set out on the road to nationhood largely unburdened by small arms proliferation. The weapons in the system were largely bequeathed to the emerging states by the departing colonial powers. As a rule, these weapons were securely under government control and diffusion into society was minimal. Viewed from the outside, therefore, West African states began independent life as an oasis of calm on a turbulent continent. From the inside, however, opposition to the new governments had begun. In what was to shape the conflict landscape of the region in the years to follow, defeated segments of the ruling civil elite agitated for a slice of power, while minority and civil society groups flexed their muscles in readiness for what were to become grassroots challenges to the evolving "diarchy" of the civilian and military elite. Meanwhile the military, the only structurally well-organised institution and crucially, the only one with direct control over and access to weapons, was waiting in the wings preparing its intervention as an uninvited arbiter.

Post-independence conflicts – 1960-1980

Internal

Throughout the colonial period, the basis of production in West Africa underwent rapid transformation, shifting the emphasis from food production for home consumption to raw material and mineral production tailored to the needs of European industry. Thus rice production gave way to timber, cotton, diamond, bauxite and gold industries in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Mali and Guinea, while in Nigeria, Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire, the production of cocoa, coffee, timber, coal, gold, bauxite and diamonds was emphasised at the expense of food crops. The consequent "proletarisation" of rural economies spurred parallel processes – urbanisation, mass unemployment – and with them, growing discontent. At independence, inherited bureaucracies and institutions were essentially repressive, having been originally designed primarily to quell native challenges to foreign rule. The chronic lack of cadres and resources and the new rulers' instinct for self-preservation combined to stall any movement towards a radical shake up of bequeathed institutions. The security forces – the army, police, gendarme, border guards and other paramilitary bodies – maintained their repressive essence going into independence and were to become a key factor in conflict transformation as the main perpetrators of gross human rights violations in the newly-independent states.

Governance implies on the one hand, the creation and fair distribution of materials and conditions for societal well being and on the other, the effective and democratic management of instruments of coercion. The right to equal protection under the law was absent before and after independence as "Africans [all] too often felt the 'force' and hardly ever the 'security', in 'security forces'."[1]In response to growing internal dissent and because of their inability to govern effectively, rulers in West Africa consolidated their regimes' security through the "ethnicisation" of the military and bureaucracy based on patron-client relations. In Nigeria, the concentration of political and military power in the Hausa-Fulani north has long been a source of conflict. At the base of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone lie attempts by the Americo-Liberians and the southern Mende (in Sierra Leone) to marginalise the natives and northern ethnicities in the governance process.

External

Three external factors exerted an exacerbating influence on the conflict situation in the sub-region: The Cold War, the francophone-anglophone dichotomy and the global

economy that imposed cuts on social expenditures and depreciating prices for raw materials. Though West Africa was not a hotbed of Cold War era proxy wars, its internal dynamics were greatly influenced by the World War II global ideological divide. For example, the radically non-aligned regime of Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana, 1957-1966) was seen by the West as a communist regime. Nkrumah's pro-people educational, economic and social welfare projects were starved of external funds and his attempts to promote autonomous African security and economic structures thwarted by the West through proxy states. Several assassination attempts, including a bomb attack, and his eventual overthrow in 1966 were organised with the active support of western intelligence services. The West launched mercenary invasions against Guinea-Conakry (1976) and Benin (1977) because their leaders, the late Sékou Touré and Mathieu Kérékou were classified as Marxist. The Communist states in reply supported labour movements and opposition groups in countries seen as pro-Western.

Even more influential in dictating the dynamics of conflict were the two key colonial powers in West Africa – the UK and France. Countries in the sub-region have often seen themselves as francophone or anglophone before African. The UK and France have sought to maintain their influence in former colonies through bilateral economic and security ties under the Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Military assistance to client states in the region have often been dictated by this rivalry and scarcely underpinned by human rights and developmental concerns. France has been the more aggressive former colonial power with its policy that, among other practices, has involved the stationing of troops in former colonies. Today, France still maintains military bases in Port Bouet in Côte d'Ivoire and Dakar in Senegal with a total force of 1,725 troops.[2] The colonial legacy was expressed most vividly during the Biafran secessionist war in Nigeria (1967-1970) when France, through the intermediary of Côte d'Ivoire, became the main supplier of weapons and rear bases to General Emeka Ojukwu's secessionist movement, while the United Kingdom backed the federal government.[3] This rivalry persists and constitutes one of the stumbling blocks to a collective security arrangement in the sub-region.

The Army

As noted above, weapons were generally under the control of the security apparatus, which made the military a major arbiter in, and then a chief source of, conflict. The ruling elite responded to the pressures of governance by retreating into the shell of coercive security paranoia. At independence the governments of all independent states

in West Africa were a parody of the liberal democracies of their former colonial masters – Westminster type in the Commonwealth and the presidential system in the francophone states. A decade later almost all had transformed into one-party states.[4] The one-party system of governance became the harbinger of institutional violence, nurturing conflict firstly by "denying space for healthy competition between ideas and among personalities and secondly, destroying the nascent structures of checks and balances within the body politic."[5] Regime security became paramount and trying to achieve this meant creating the threat of war by unleashing structural violence – economic and political repression of those outside the system. The police, and often the army, were called in at the least sign of public unrest. The army became a privileged institution and profession both in terms of remuneration and as a playground for elite ethnic groups.

Having realised its power and indispensability to the ruling civilian authority, the army was soon to intervene decisively in politics by taking the reigns of government. Usually, it timed its entry to coincide with the point of stalemate in confrontations between the government and civil society, thereby posing as a saviour and even winning applause from ordinary people. On occasions, it carried out coups d'etat on the prompting of external powers or defeated opposition parties, as was evidenced in Ghana in 1966. Thus between 1963, when General Gnassingbe Eyadema staged the first West African coup in Togo and 1979, when Captain Boakye Gyan and Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings of Ghana ushered in the era of junior officers' coups, summit meetings in Africa came to resemble more of military durbars than political gatherings. West Africa was ushered into the era of what Ali Mazrui called 'the lumpen-militariat.'[6] The love affair between soldiers' rule and civil society was always short-lived. Usually having come to power on the wave of popular resentment against civilian rulers, the military soon lost the goodwill of the population. Ill-equipped to rule or manage state bureaucracies, the army soon resorted to the tools it was most familiar with – violence and repression. Invariably, its very first act upon usurping power was to create a conducive atmosphere for human rights violations by suspending constitutions and ruling by decree.

Where military rule was confronted by mass protests, the army reacted in one of three ways: it perfected its repressive apparatus to consolidate its dictatorship (as was the case with General Eyadema's rule in Togo and General Sani Abacha's in Nigeria); it yielded to the pressures by handing over and returning to the barracks to plan its next entry (as often occurred in Ghana and Nigeria); or it attempted to 'civilianise' its rule

Table I: Balance Sheet of Civilian and Military Rule in West Africa 1960-1998

Country	Alignment	No. of Civilian-led Regimes	No. of Military-Backed Regimes	Combined Years of Civilian-led Rule	Combined Years of Military-Backed Rule	Current Democratic Status
The Gambia	Commonwealth	1	2	30	5	Authoritarian /Transitional
Ghana	Commonwealth	3	6	10	28	Transitional
Nigeria	Commonwealth	2	8	10	28	Unstable/ Transitional
Sierra Leone	Commonwealth	3	6	26	12	Pause in Civil War
Benin	Francophone	7	6	14	24	Consolidating
Burkina Faso	Francophone	1	4	6	32	Authoritarian /Transitional
Guinea-Conakry	Francophone	1	1	24	14	Authoritarian /Unstable
Mali	Francophone	2	3	9	29	Transitional
Niger	Francophone	3	3	19	19	Authoritarian
Togo	Francophone	2	2	7	31	Authoritarian /Dictatorial
Guinea-Bissau	Lusophone	1	1	6	18	Unstable/ Authoritarian
Liberia	American (USA)	2	1	28	10	Emerging from War

by co-opting civilian politicians into a power-sharing arrangement. The unsuccessful attempt by Ghana's General Ignatius Acheampong in 1978 to transform his Supreme Military Council junta into a non-party civil-military government – the Union Government – stands out as the best example. The civil-military diarchy in Sierra Leone (under civilian President Siaka Stevens and General Joseph Momoh) and in Nigeria under various military leaders, was thus born out of a mutual necessity. On the one hand, civilian rulers soon realised that their governments were always vulnerable to the guns of the military. Not even the creation of special presidential armies and security services outside the official army could insulate them against putsches; if anything, the proliferation of security forces only added to the repression against the civilian population. On the other hand, the military also recognised that guns were a necessary but grossly insufficient prerequisite for governance. In both calculations, the interests and real security of the population did not factor in beyond rhetoric. The rural habitat, home to over 80 per cent of the West African population,

was criminally starved of basic amenities; the land could not sustain rural livelihood for a lack of government input and competitive prices for produce. Education was neglected and the health delivery system run down. Women were discriminated against in education even as they slaved away at home and in the fields without remuneration. Young people abandoned the countryside in droves to swell the army of school dropouts and the unemployed in the urban peripheries. As in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the system created a vast pool of potential perpetrators of violence.

Era of the Junior Militariat and the beginning of small arms proliferation

As noted earlier, creating and assuring conditions of holistic security were not considered as crucial as maintaining a monopoly over arms and security forces for self-preservation in the thinking of the ruling civil-military diarchies. Ironically, such skewed thinking played a crucial role in the proliferation of small arms and the escalation of conflicts. If, up to the mid-1970s, the number of deaths resulting from violent struggles for power was usually small and mainly limited to soldiers from opposing camps (during putsches) and assassination of political leaders, the end of the 1970s saw a dramatic rise in casualty figures related to political violence. The link between escalating violence and diffusion of small arms into the civilian domain is obvious.

Ghana

In June 1979, a group of junior military officers overthrew the ruling junta of army generals. For want of leadership material within their ranks, they chose two radical junior officers, Capt. Boakye Gyan and Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings, to head the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council junta that they set up. They had managed to breach the tight security around the armouries in the capital, Accra, and seized weapons. In what was regarded as an escalation of violence in the country, the young officers executed eight senior army officers including two former heads of state, to a chorus of support from citizens fed up with institutional graft. In a turbulent three-month campaign codenamed 'Housecleaning Exercise', the new junta confiscated assets belonging to those suspected of corruption and tax-evasion, forced down prices in the local bazaars and forced businesses to pay back taxes. The operation did not always produce the desired results. For example, the central Makola Market in Accra, the main source of livelihood for thousands of women traders, was singled out as the nerve centre of hoarding and price-fixing and was razed with explosives.[7]

In December 1981, Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings seized the reigns of power once more, this time from an elected civilian government. Arms for the coup were allegedly supplied by Col. Muamar Gaddafi of Libya and smuggled to Ghana on fishing trawlers.[8] In what resembled a civil-military diarchy, the leadership of the ruling Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) comprised junior officers and young civilians of radical political persuasion.[9] For the first time, small arms made their way into civilian hands. Thousands of AK-47 assault rifles were distributed among civilian cadres and groups within the People's Defence Committees (who took over community and local administration) and Workers' Defence Committees on the factory floors. Gun-totting soldiers and civilians became a common sight as they mounted joint operations and policed imposed curfews. Not surprisingly, the country recorded a corresponding sharp rise in gun-related violence, particularly between 1982 and 1985. Armed civilian cadres, ill-trained to handle weapons, maimed themselves and suspected 'enemies of the revolution' in the streets of Accra.[10]

The culture of violence and human rights violations: 1982-1989

On 30 June 1982, under the cover of darkness, three Ghanaian senior court judges and a retired army officer opposed to the military coup were abducted at gunpoint from their homes by mufti-clad security forces armed with AK-47 assault rifles. A few days later, their charred bodies were discovered in the forest near an army jungle warfare school.[11] This sordid incident set the stage for a cycle of violence and human rights violations in a deliberate strategy to instill fear and silence in Ghana. The instruments of torture, murder and harassment were many: the secret service, the Bureau of National Investigation (equipped with torture equipment supplied by Bulgaria and other eastern European states[12]), the Special Reserve Battalion and the Commandos (drawn from elements loyal to the head of state), civil defence committees, and special tribunals.

Following a failed coup attempt against the regime in April 1983, over seventy soldiers and scores of police officers and civilians were summarily executed and dumped in mass graves. Torture, armed robbery and summary executions became the order of the day, spurred on by the diffusion of weapons into society. Between 1983 and 1989, the number of people the regime officially acknowledged executing for various crimes stood at 108.[13] In reality, the figure was ten times as high. For example, a dossier compiled by the opposition Ghana Democratic Movement put the figure at 207 between 1982 and 1985 alone.[14] Out of desperation, Ghanaians began fleeing the country. In 1981, the

number of Ghanaians who sought political asylum in the UK stood at 13. This rose to 407 in 1982, 689 in 1983 and 337 in 1984.[15]

Other regional military coups

In a popular coup in April 1980, Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe brought to an end the rule of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy that had dominated the political and economic life of Liberia since its creation as a settlement for freed American slaves in 1847. According to Amos Sawyer the major debate and source of conflict at the time of Liberia's creation was whether the country should be an exclusionist state and an outpost of American civilisation in Africa, or an inclusionist state incorporating the entities in the immediate environment.[16] In the event, the True Whig Party that dominated the political life of Liberia till the coup of 1980 chose 'black apartheid'. The poor segments of the community, largely the natives who made up 95 per cent of the population, were effectively excluded from political and economic processes through deliberate impoverishment and illiteracy. In April 1979, after the government of William Tolbert had decided to end state subsidy on rice, the staple food of the vast majority, riots engulfed the country. The security forces cracked down on the rioters, killing and maiming hundreds of people. Samuel Doe seized the opportunity and staged a bloody coup. He assassinated Tolbert and publicly executed thirteen of the country's most prominent politicians at the main beach of the capital, Monrovia.[17].

Master-Sergeant Doe appropriated the repressive state machinery and turned it against the settlers and opponents within the indigenous elite. Repression was raised to a pathological level as he launched a decade of ruthless exercise of power and a vicious cycle of violence. In response, upheaval engulfed the country with at least seven coup attempts made against his regime. The cumulative effects of bad governance and denial of basic rights to the people opened the floodgates to the civil war in December 1989 that tore the country apart. (See below).

Junior officers' coups became a pattern in the sub-region. In 1983, Captain Thomas Sankara led a group of soldiers from the Po Camp near the Ghana border to overthrow the regime in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). It was strongly alleged that the arms and additional personnel for the coup were supplied by the Rawlings' regime in Ghana. In 1994, straight from serving with the ECOMOG peacekeeping forces in Liberia, another junior officer, Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, overthrew the 30 year-old corrupt regime of

Child soldiers and sex slaves

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, children and women have been abducted, and indoctrinated, used as combatants, sex slaves or carriers of weapons and loot.[18] According to UNICEF, in Sierra Leone, 5,000 children under the age of 18 are fully or partially under arms serving predominantly with the RUF/AFRC rebel alliance, but also with the pro-government Kamajor Militia. 10,000 are registered as separated from their parents and wandering in neighbouring states.[19] Girl abductees recently freed from the hands of rebels in Sierra Leone have told harrowing stories of their ordeals. According to Christiana Thorpe of the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE),

Girls were retained as 'wives' and trained to fight using guns, knives, machetes and clubs…These female rebels have become so brutalised they even rape young men… Their babies are drugged to sleep while they go on their daily business to kill, maim, loot and burn houses with impunity.[20]

Other human rights abuses committed largely by the rebel alliance, but also by pro-government forces (ECOMOG troops and the Kamajors) have included mutilations and summary executions.

President Dawda Jawara in the small Commonwealth state of the Gambia. In 1995, Captain Valentine Strasser followed up with a coup against the general Momoh regime in Sierra Leone.

All these junior officers' coups had common characteristics. Firstly, they were all the culmination of people's resentment against both the civilian and military top brass. They were a response to bad governance, client politics and increasing poverty. Secondly, the doors to participation in the political and economic life of the country, at least in the first few years of the 'revolutions', were opened to the sectors of society hitherto debarred from the nation-building process – students, workers from the factory floors, young radical civilian politicians and the lower echelons of the security forces. Thirdly, there was an increase in the diffusion of small arms into society and a consequent rise in gun-related violence and repression against sectors of the society. President Rawlings called this the 'pay-back time against 'those who had made peaceful change impossible'. Thus began what Yeebo termed the 'decentralisation of violence'.[21]

By no means the primary cause of instability, the easier availability of small arms nonetheless enabled particular segments of the society to decisively intervene in conflicts and change the balance of forces in their favour. There was a general and dangerous appreciation of the fact that without weapons, one could not penetrate the closed rent-seeking political system. Crucially though, the widening of access to small arms corresponded with the intensity of conflicts and with it, higher levels of violent crime.

Small arms in the Era of Civil Wars

From the early 1990s, regimes in West Africa came under immense internal and international pressure to at least formally widen the internal political space. Civil society challenges to the state became more vocal, and usually more volatile. The influence of the private sector also grew, with multilateral financial institutions exerting greater influence on economic affairs. The security sector, for decades the beneficiary of generous state support, came under increasing pressure as external donor agencies called for lower military spending. The IMF decreed that defence expenditures in excess of 4.5% of the national budget was economically untenable.[22] Indeed, an IMF study had observed that:

> '[A]lthough the military has been protected [from structural adjustment] in the past, the sector now tends to be hit harder than others in the fiscal adjustment process, the emerging pattern [being that] countries are relying to a much greater extent than before on cuts to the military to pay for fiscal adjustment'.[23]

Underpaid, poorly trained and under-resourced, security forces became instruments of increased human rights abuse. Their operational focus shifted progressively from the duty to maintain law and order to the need for survival – usually through extortion. Also, the increasing encroachment of private actors on military security, a sector that was traditionally regarded as state prerogative, introduced multiple players into the weapons supply and demand network. Via rogue dealers, brokers and air cargo companies, a small arms pipeline connecting Europe, North Africa and the West African conflict system began to operate. This greatly facilitated access to weapons. With avenues of peaceful negotiation blocked by repressive regimes, the easy availability of small arms enabled marginalised groups to shoot their way into the national negotiation process – through civil wars.

II. The characteristics of the West African conflict system

If West Africa can be described as a conflict system, the epicentre comprises the Mano River states: Liberia, from where a regional war began in 1989; Sierra Leone, where the war spread beginning in 1991; and Guinea-Conakry, another country on the verge of civil war. Other states in the sub-region have been drawn into the conflict in one way or the other. These include the Commonwealth states of Nigeria, Ghana and the Gambia, as well as francophone Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. These conflicts have transcended the anglophone-francophone divide, have directly involved a Commonwealth state (Sierra Leone) and drawn other Commonwealth states into their orbit.

Certain characteristics of the wars are common:
- With the virtual collapse of state institutions, central authority lost control over national armies and could not exercise its coercive prerogatives. Factional armies, usually civilian warriors, emerged under the leadership of civilian warlords with one eye on resource appropriation and the other on political power.
- The combatants focused their attacks on the capture of resource enclaves as a means of acquiring weapons for the prosecution of war for political control.
- Colonial-imposed boundaries lost their relevance as rebel territories spanned several countries in the sub-region. The civil wars were usually launched from neighbouring states and raged within and across national frontiers.
- The management of the resulting conflicts was entrusted to the private sector, as evidenced in the proliferation of mercenary forces in these conflicts.
- In the prosecution of the wars, the target of attacks was not so much the state but civilians – women, children, the elderly; and civilian infrastructure – schools, hospitals, mining complexes and businesses.

The West African small arms pipeline

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, small arms flows, as well as the exploitation and marketing of such resources as diamonds, gold, timber and rubber to acquire further weapons and pay for the services of private armies, followed a common pattern. Libya was a common source of training and weapons for the combatants.[24] Weapons entered the conflict zone via neighbouring states. At various times, these states have included Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Conakry, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria. Private brokers and rogue financiers using private airlines have also arranged transfers of weapons and

ammunitions from eastern Europe and southern Africa. Factions in the wars have likewise replenished stocks through the capture of weapons from opponents. The Mano River space and the territory of Côte d'Ivoire serve as the common market for the illegitimate exploitation and exchange of mineral/forest resources for guns.

The West African small arms routes were first established in the course of the Liberian civil war, which began in 1989 when Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded the towns of Khanple and Butuo in the northern county of Nimba from inside Sierra Leone. Small arms and resource movement within the region followed the paths established within the informal economy. These routes have been in existence since before independence and were created to meet several needs: migration; cross-border smuggling of minerals and cash crops (diamonds, gold, cocoa, coffee); and the semi-legal trade in imported consumer goods by local traders. They have thus created an informal regional economy straddling all the countries in the sub-region. The operational territory of the NPFL war economy at various times comprised a vast area, taking in parts of Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Guinea-Conakry.

Arms routes into the West African conflict system

Given the nature of illicit arms transfers, it is difficult to quantify the scale of weapons and ammunition flowing into the conflict system. Libya was instrumental as a source of supply, and its leader, Col. Muamar Gaddafi, was the patron of rebel insurgents in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Burkina Faso under Blaise Campaoré has been the main conduit state for Libyan arms. The first contingent of NPFL trainee insurgents – mainly peasants from the Nimba County of Liberia – received training in Libya and resettled in Burkina Faso.[25] AK-47 assault rifles, grenades and mortars were airlifted from Libya to Burkina Faso, from where they were taken on a Fokker-28 owned by Burkina Faso to Man Airport in western Côte d'Ivoire for onward transfer by cargo trucks to the NPFL base in Gbarnga inside Liberia.[26]

The NPFL supplemented its stocks with illicit war materiel acquired through the illegal trade in minerals, timber and rubber from rebel-controlled zones. The security forces and businessmen in Côte d'Ivoire facilitated the transshipment of arms, as well as the trade in diamonds and forest products.[27] According to one observer, Ivorian officials 'arranged business meetings for Taylor and his commanders while gendarmes escorted

Weapons crossing points

Arms Routes
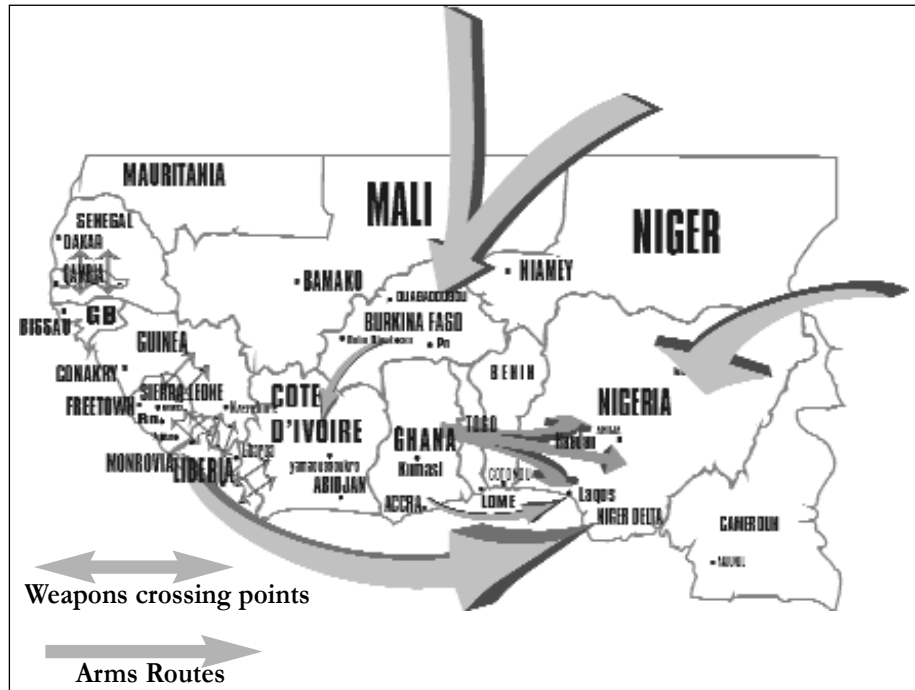
them around and custom and immigration officials [did] not seem to pay any attention to the goods that crossed the border'.[28] NPFL diamonds and forest products were now transported from Gbarnga through the Ivorian town of Danane to the ports of San Pedro and Abidjan. Here, the goods were shipped to Europe and the United States. The Gbarnga-Danane road became, therefore, a strategic 'minerals for guns' route in the West African conflict.[29]

Although the civil war in Liberia formally ended with the signing of a peace accord and general elections in July 1997, there is little sign of co-operation and tolerance among the former warring factions. Factions are holding on to sizeable arms caches partly because of their mistrust of Charles Taylor. On 18 September 1998, renewed violence erupted between state security forces and combatants loyal to the United Liberation Movement (ULIMO) faction led by Roosevelt Johnson in the streets of Monrovia. As many as 500 people were estimated to have perished in the fighting while around 3,000 people, predominantly from Johnson's ethnic group – the Krahns from Grand Gedeh County – fled to Côte d'Ivoire.[30]

The very interrelationships between Liberian-supplied weapons and the on-going wars in the conflict cluster and the unwillingness of the international community to bankroll reconstruction as a consequence, are breeding a siege mentality in Monrovia that feeds the arms flows. Sustained pressure by Nigeria, Ghana, the UK and USA has, however, weakened Taylor's resolve to continue meddling in the Sierra Leone war for now and to hold on to weapons collected during the civil war by the West African interventionist force, ECOMOG. On 26 July 1999, the Taylor administration burnt 1,500 guns in a symbolic pyre in Monrovia[31]. The destruction of weapons was meant as a gesture of goodwill marking the commencement of the elimination of some 30,000 weapons and 2 million rounds of ammunition collected by peacekeeping forces. Commenting on the weapons destruction, eight Liberian human rights groups wrote:

'We see it as an irony that arms and ammunition seized from former warring factions are publicly burnt, while new armed units spring up with new and more sophisticated weapons.'[32]

III. The Sierra Leone civil war

The civil war in Sierra Leone began in March 1991 when the guerrilla Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded eastern Sierra Leone from inside Liberia, with the aim of toppling General Joseph Momoh's government. Sparked by complete breakdown in the internal negotiation process and facilitated by small arms, the civil war in Sierra Leone nonetheless traces its roots to the state's peripheral status in the global economy and illegitimate resource appropriation in the country. Corporal Foday Sankoh and two other leaders of the RUF, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray, had been recruited for training in Benghazi, Libya in July-August 1987. The Libyan connection explained the alliance between the RUF and Charles Taylor's NPFL, which provided arms and insurgents for the RUF invasion. Since 1991, the war has claimed close to 50,000 lives and displaced over 1.5 million people.

Peace Efforts

There have been two key moments in the attempts to end the seemingly intractable conflict. Efforts by the Economic Community of West African States, Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations to find a peaceful solution yielded the 1996 Abidjan Peace Accord, which only ensured tentative peace but paved the way for general elections in March of the same year. The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won the

ensuing elections and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the SLPP leader, became president. The SLPP was however swept aside by an alliance of the RUF and elements within the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) on 25 May 1997. A ruling junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was set up and the civil war intensified. In February 1998, President Tejan Kabbah was reinstated after combined forces of ECOMOG, mercenaries and the local pro-government militia *(the Kamajors)* drove the junta out of Freetown. On 7 July 1999, a new power-sharing deal was brokered between the SLPP and RUF under the auspices of ECOWAS, OAU, UN and the Commonwealth in Lome, Togo.

The Rebel Alliance

The initial weaponry in the hands of the RUF came from Libya and sympathetic neighbouring states, mainly Liberia and Burkina Faso. As the war intensified, the RUF bartered diamonds mined from areas under its control for arms. It further supplemented its armoury with the weapons brought in by RSLMF desertees and those captured from pro-government forces – ECOMOG and the *Kamajors.* For example, the RUF launched a surprise attack on the ECOMOG base in Kono in December 1998; it routed the ECOMOG forces and captured all their weapons, including three armoured tanks[33]. 70 per cent of ECOMOG weaponry was stationed at the Kono base at the time and Nigeria had to fly in urgent replacements. Furthermore, shady brokers, financiers and air cargo companies have combined to keep arms flowing through illegal diamond trade, narco-business and arms shipment, a phenomenon that has developed a life of its own in the region, fuelling violence and criminality.[34]

A secret airstrip in the eastern town of Kenema manned by the RUF has become the main entry point for illegal weapons - AK-47 assault rifles, 60mm portable mortars and even surface to air missiles - mainly from eastern Europe.[35] Boats are also used to ferry weapons from Liberia. Air companies moving weapons to the conflict zone have included *Ibis Air,* partly owned by Executive Outcomes (See next section), *Soruss Airline* (a joint venture between shady Belarussian businessmen and Steve Bio, the brother of former Sierra Leone head of state, Brigadier Maada Bio[36]) and two British companies, *Sky Air* and *Occidental.* The latter reportedly shipped nearly 400 tons of arms and ammunition from the Slovak Republic to the RUF forces in defiance of the official UK position.[37]

Mercenary Forces and Networks

Mercenary outfits have been a part and parcel of the Sierra Leone civil war ever since the government contracted the UK-based Gurkha Security Guards and later South Africa-based Executive Outcomes (EO) in 1995 to shore up the pro-government defences. Today, The hub of frenetic mercenary activity seems to have shifted from Luanda (Angola) to Freetown, where private military companies are falling over themselves to market their deadly expertise to the state and international entities alike.

When the rebel alliance overthrew the Kabbah regime in May 1997, the UN Security Council passed a resolution that, inter alia, prohibited:

The sale or supply by all States to Sierra Leone, by their nationals or from their territories, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, of petroleum and petroleum products and arms and related materiel of all types, including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment and spare parts for the aforementioned, whether or not originating in their territory.[40]

However, UK-based Sandline International signed a military contract with the exiled government of President Tejan Kabbah to "return the democratically elected government to Sierra Leone by means of direct action (combat), procurement and delivery (of arms and logistics – auth.)"[41]. It agreed to:

- Train and equip some 40,000 ethnic Kamajor militia[42], some of whom were based in camps inside Guinea and others involved in skirmishes with the AFRC-RUF alliance.
- Co-ordinate with 20,000 ECOMOG (mainly Nigerian) troops based in Lungi Airport near Freetown for the assault on Freetown.

For these purposes, Sandline brokered the shipment of 35 tons of AK-47 assault rifles, ammunition and mortars into Sierra Leone in February 1998[43]. The weapons were shipped from Bulgaria to Kano in Northern Nigeria on relay to Sierra Leone via *Ibis Airl,* a company partly owned by the mercenary network. When the plane landed in Kano, Nigeria took over the operation and ferried the weapons to Sierra Leone to arm the anti-junta forces – ECOMOG and the Kamajor militia. At various times Sandline and Executive Outcomes, which maintain close operational links, have supported Nigerian operations with air power and supplied mercenary pilots – including veterans Joup Joubert, Neil Ellis, Ukrainians and Russians - for the Nigerian AlphaJets and Mi-24 HIND gunships. In conjunction with Nigerian forces, the alliance has offered military training to the Kamajors.

Hostage taking

Rebel groups and factions marginalised by recent peace deals in both Sierra Leone and Liberia have resorted to kidnapping to make their point. To attract international attention, these groups have specifically targeted expatriates. In early August 1999, AFRC combatants who had been holding several women and children hostage for months, abducted five UK army officers attached to a UN mission. It took the abduction of UK nationals to draw international attention to the local abductees and trigger a flurry of diplomatic activity that soon led to the release of the Britons. As a bonus some 200 women and children who had been in captivity for years, were also released.[38]

Almost simultaneously, Liberian rebels armed with assault rifles and apparently drawn from various opposition factions, crossed from Guinea and attacked five localities of Lofa County in north-western Liberia. In Kolahun, they invaded the compounds of two aid agencies – Medical Relief Emergency International (MERLIN) and Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and took six foreign workers hostage, alongside scores of local inhabitants and journalists.[39]

The Sandline/Executive Outcomes transnational mercenary conglomerate with its mining wing, the Branch-Heritage group, has made significant inroads into the political economy of Sierra Leone, dictating terms in the security market, winning lucrative mining and security contracts such as the Sierra Rutile and Koidu concessions. The cash contract for EO intervention in Sierra Leone from May to December 1995 was $13.5 million.[44] President Kabbah further renewed the latter's contract from April 1996 for twenty more months at a fee of $35.2 million. By July 1996, diamond mines in the Kono District, where the EO offensive against the RUF was mainly concentrated, kimberlite pipes and other mineral assets along the Sewa River in Koidu, had been granted to Branch Energy[45], one of the several corporate mining entities fronting for EO and Sandline International. In 1996, the majority shares in Branch Energy transferred to Vancouver-based DiamondWorks, another front organisation 30% of which is controlled by Tony Buckingham, the main financier behind the EO-Branch Energy conglomerate[46]. When EO was forced out of Sierra Leone in January 1997, they left behind their mercenary field brigade, LifeGuard Systems, to protect Branch Energy's possessions in Koidu.

Other individual mercenaries and private security companies have also been involved in the conflict, offering their services either to the AFRC/RUF rebel alliance and rival mining companies. Perhaps, the most dangerous mercenary today remains Carl Alberts, a former EO top gun who has switched allegiance to the rebels. Security companies that have been active or explored possibilities for business in the country include Defence Systems Ltd., which provides security to UN and NGO humanitarian convoys and the American groups International Chartered Incorporated (ICI) and Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI). Russian helicopters, eastern and western European mercenaries have been spotted making sorties for the rebel alliance from bases inside Liberia.[47]

In January 1999 the RUF-AFRC alliance occupied Freetown for two weeks, provoking a counter-attack by ECOMOG forces. This episode threw further light on the extent of mercenary involvement in the conflict. In the course of the counter-offensive, ECOMOG fighter jets and naval gunboats attacked a ship ferrying mercenaries and weapons from Liberia into rebel-controlled territory in Sierra Leone. Several mercenaries – alleged to be mainly Ukrainians, Liberians and Burkinabe – perished in the attack[48]. An Israeli mercenary, Reserve Lieutenant-Colonel Yair Klein, contracted by Tejan Kabbah as military advisor in August 1998, turned out to be a double agent who had previously trained the Medellin cartel's death squads in Columbia and who also shipped weapons from Libya and Ukraine to the RUF[49]. In a related development, Colonel Fred Rundels (until recently an operative of EO) and Nico Shafer (who worked for the former Colombian cocaine baron Pablo Escobar), were reported to have set up an international consortium with Liberian President Charles Taylor and the RUF that involves diamonds, narcotics, arms and mercenary procurement[50].

Thus Sierra Leone, where conflict erupted partially because of illegitimate resource appropriation has had to further mortgage natural resources in return for mercenary security cover. The link between mercenary activity, deepening impoverishment and conflict escalation becomes self-evident. The convoluted networks sketched above also demonstrate the links between mercenary activity and arms/narcotics proliferation. According to the United Nations, approximately seven million small arms are making their rounds in West African conflicts.[51] West Africa has also been identified as one of the main transit routes for the narcotics trade into Europe and the US.[52] As long as the region's small arms pipeline remains open, it will undermine the prospects for conflict de-escalation, reigning in crime and promoting human rights. The links between mercenary outfits and insruments of violence expose the insurmountable difficulties to

be encountered in any attempts to harness or streamline mercenary activity for peace.

Nigerian intervention in Sierra Leone

Troops and weaponry from Nigeria, the most powerful Commonwealth state in the sub-region, were also marshalled to shore up government defences. Nigerian military presence in Sierra Leone predates the present crisis. Upon the invitation of former president Joseph Momoh, a battalion of Nigerian troops was stationed in Freetown and Bo in 1991 as part of the war efforts against the RUF. Under the NPRC junta, the deployment was enlarged to include military trainers in 1994 to form the Nigerian Technical Assistance Group (NATAG).[53] This was a purely bilateral agreement in which ECOWAS had no input. NATAG transformed into a 10,000 Nigerian interventionist force that effectively assumed the mantle of ECOMOG. For the same purposes and under a separate agreement, a battalion of troops from Guinea-Conakry has also been deployed in the country since 1991. Nigerian-supplied AK-47 assault rifles, naval boats and AlphaJets have constituted the main backbone of the ECOMOG interventionist forces in the conflict. Nigeria's attitude to West Africa is captured in its 'concentric foreign policy' doctrine, propounded by former leaders, Generals Murtala Muhammad and Olusegun Obasanjo. It consists of "a pattern of concentric circles, at the epicentre of which are the national polity and economic interest of Nigeria, which are inextricably tied up with the security, stability and economic and social well being of Nigeria's immediate neighbours".[54] In 1989, a study commissioned by General Babangida into ways of turning the tide against the spate of junior officers' coups in West Africa recommended keeping junior officers busy in peacekeeping operations outside Nigeria.[55]

General Sani Abacha's agenda in Sierra Leone had three main objectives. First, he wished to establish Nigeria as the undisputed hegemon in West Africa and as the natural African representative at a yet to be enlarged UN Security Council. Secondly, he aimed at whitewashing his junta's image within the international community. At the Commonwealth summit in 1995, Nigeria's membership was suspended in response to the gross abuse of human rights by the Abacha junta. By acting as the promoter of "peace and democracy" in Liberia and Sierra Leone, he wanted the international community to judge his regime not by its internal policy of repression and corruption, but by its external role as stabiliser-in-chief in the West African sub-region. The third reason was economic. A Nigerian newspaper has stated with authority that Abacha's energetic policy in Sierra Leone was underpinned by the offer of a staggering diamonds concession.[56] These diamonds also offered an opportunity for the poorly paid and

restless Nigerian junior officers to line their pockets. There were reports of looting, arms sales and diamond hunting by Nigerian officers both in Liberia and Sierra Leone.[57] Finally, Nigeria's military dictators were wary of bringing home troops with combat experience from Liberia, particularly as their counterparts from other countries had returned home to topple their own leaders.[58] Sierra Leone thus provided an opportunity to keep the soldiers occupied elsewhere.

Table II: West Africa – Comparative Indicators

Country	HDI Ranking (Out of 174)	Defence Expenditure As % of GDP			Expenditure on Health As % of GDP		Human Rights Situation (1998)
	1999	1985	1996	1997	1960	1995	
Gambia	163	1.5	3.9	3.7		1.7	20 POCs
Ghana	133	1.0	1.4	1.5	1.1	1.6	8 POCs
Nigeria	146	3.4	4.1	4.0	0.3	0.3	44 POCs
Sierra Leone	174	1.0	5.9	6.9			1000s killed in war, rape, mutilations, summary executions
Liberia		2.4	4.1	3.9			34 charged with treason, several disappearances
Guinea Bissau	168	5.7	3.0	2.6		1.1	8 POWs, rape, torture
Guinea Conakry	161	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.0	1.2	Hundreds detained, unfair trials, torture.
Benin	155	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.8	2 murders, 14 death sentences.
Niger	173	0.5	1.4	1.4	0.2	1.6	Dozens detained, many murdered by security forces.
Burkina Faso	171	1.1	2.4	2.2	0.6	4.7	5 suspicious deaths, 2 tortured to death
Mali	166	1.4	1.8	1.7	1.0	2.0	7 POCs, 5 death sentences
Côte d'Ivoire	154	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.5	1.4	30 POCs, Police brutality
Senegal	153	1.1	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.2	160 Casamance rebels detained without trial, Torture

Sources:
DefenceExpenditure: *The Military Balance 1998/99*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Oxford University Press, 1999.
Education and Health: *Human Development Report 1999*, United Nations Development Programme, oxford university Press, 1999.
Human Rights Situation: *Country Reports 1999*, Amnesty International.
* POC – Prisoner of conscience.   * HDI – Human Development Index according to the UNDP.

IV. Nigeria: over-centralisation, human rights violations and arms flows

In Nigeria, the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers and engineers has captured media headlines and international attention. On 24 June 1999, armed militants near Warri in the Delta State took 16 employees of Shell hostage. Two weeks earlier, a helicopter pilot and two British engineers working for Shell-contracted Bristol Helicopters were also seized at gunpoint by kidnappers, who demanded US$100,000 in ransom for their release.[59] Two Indian engineers working for a rubber company are still in the hands of abductors.

Abductions are a culmination of Nigeria's recent history of military brutality and corruption under the late General Sani Abacha. The incarceration of Moshood Abiola, who had won free and fair elections in 1993, marked the beginning of General Abacha's reign of terror. The security forces used small arms to murder, maim and detain pro-democracy activists. Moshood Abiola's wife, Kudirat, was murdered in suspicious circumstances while scores of pro-democracy leaders and journalists, including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, were charged with treason. Faced with an impossible situation, anti-regime groups began smuggling weapons into the country and sporadic bomb attacks on military installations brought the country to the brink of civil war in 1997.[60] Matters came to a head when the military dictatorship began to randomly arrest, detain and murder suspected opponents, referring to them as 'prisoners of war'. Civil war was only averted by the sudden death of Abacha in June 1998.

Small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta

Weapons proliferation has become a major problem in the Niger Delta, a region accounting for over 90 per cent of the country's oil revenue but remaining one of the most neglected in Nigeria. The Niger Delta has been subjected to criminal social neglect and ecological degradation thanks to collusion between the military dictatorship and the Western oil giant, Royal Dutch Shell.[61] Oil revenue has either been diverted into the defence budget to fund Nigeria's policing role in West Africa, or siphoned by top military officials into private accounts. Up to 76% of gas is flared in Nigeria compared to 4.3% in the UK. The gas-related pollution generated in the Niger Delta alone is greater than that produced in the entire UK's households.[62] Nigeria is the world's twelfth leading exporter of oil, but the country has been in the grip of fuel shortage and blackouts for years. In October 1998, villagers from Jesse and other communities near Warri in the Niger Delta went scavenging for fuel along burst oil-pipes. In the scramble, fire broke out killing over 1,000.[63] The federal government has so far refused

to meet the demands of the Delta people for a fair share of oil revenue and autonomy. Instead, the military detained, mock-tried and hanged Ken Saro-Wiwa, the prominent Ogoni leader. Armed punitive expeditions were subsequently despatched to the region, resulting in the murder of thousands. The refusal by successive regimes to devolve real power to the states and regions is at the base of ethnic tensions and the state of war that currently characterises the Niger Delta. Criminal gangs have taken advantage of the situation to exacerbate the crisis.

As peaceful means to resolve the crisis has faded, small arms have entered the region. In isolated cases, Delta communities in the international diaspora have sent weapons to Niger Delta communities for self-defence. In 1992, a customs official gave out 16 G-3 rifles to the Ijaw youth as his contribution to the Niger Delta cause. In the main, however, small arms have moved into the Delta from official sources. Following the escalation of violence, oil companies reached an agreement with the government to import weapons for Nigerian troops and the Special Shell Police in the Delta. Some of these weapons have been illegally sold to youths and criminal gangs by security forces, as well as by ECOMOG troops redeployed to the region from Sierra Leone.

Outside the Niger Delta, ethnic tensions and poverty have combined to spawn weapons smuggling syndicates that supply chauvinists and criminal gangs. These guns are fuelling gangster-style robbery and murders in the Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan areas and communal violence in Kano in the north.[64]

Other sources of small arms

Arms dealers, security personnel and corrupt state officials have teamed up to operate an illegal gun-market linking neighbouring states and the Niger Delta via the sea. Thousands of weapons recently seized in the Lagos and Ijaw areas of Nigeria show a variety of locally produced shotguns, as well as AK-47 rifles from the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes conflicts. The gun underworld, comprising brokers and buyers, depends on smugglers who ferry small arms along the Niger and Congo rivers. The Congo River has become a vital waterway link between West Africa and East Africa with a liaison at the seacoast of francophone Gabon.[65] In Warri, an oil-rich town in the Delta, youths openly hawk pistols and automatic rifles (referred to by local dealers as 'pure water') for between US$200 and US$400.[66] On 20 July 1999, Nigerian customs officials intercepted a canoe manned by six Ghanaians

disguised as fishermen off the coast of Lagos. A search uncovered 96 sacks containing 72,500 rounds of ammunition with a street value of about US$247,700.[67] Since then, the Ghanaian government has suspended the importation of small arms and cartridges by licenced arms dealers in an attempt to stem the flow of illegal weapons to neighbouring states.[68]

Between November 1995 and 8 January 1999, police and customs officials in Nigeria and Benin have seized at least 3,500 assault rifles, 80,000 rounds of ammunition and some 200 pistols from smuggling syndicates.[69] Included in the confiscations were:
* 10 rifles and 10,000 rounds of live ammunition concealed in a vehicle travelling to Lagos from Ghana.
* 5 double-barrelled shotguns guns and 22,000 cartridges of live ammunition concealed as general goods on a trawler sailing from Ghana and owned by a Nigerian. Customs officials at Apapa Port, Nigeria made the discovery.
* In November 1995, border guards at Seme in Benin arrested three Nigerians including a university professor and a woman trying to smuggle 3,000 rifles and 7,000 rounds of ammunition into Nigeria.

V Arms flow dynamics in other Commonwealth states

Ghana
The problem of arms proliferation in Ghana is closely linked with political developments. Arms caches exist in Ghana, a direct consequence of liberal arms distribution and the political turbulence between 1982 and 1985 (See section on Ghana above). In 1994, inter-ethnic violence flared up between the Nanumba and Konkomba in the North that led to thousands of deaths and destruction of property. The small arms used for the prosecution of the war were smuggled from Burkina Faso and Togo. Soldiers and other security forces belonging to the rival ethnic groups also diverted weapons to arm the factions. Besides, Ghanaian communities such as Alavanyo and Nkonya in the Volta Region and Yendi in the Northern Region maintain a long tradition of gunsmithing. Locally made shotguns traditionally used for hunting became weapons of war with the outbreak of violence.

The biggest threat from the standpoint of small arms proliferation comes in the year 2000. President Rawlings has come to symbolise Ghana since 1979. Massive human rights abuses between 1979 and 1985 were committed under his leadership. However,

Ghana has since 1992 enjoyed relative stability and a measure of democracy. Nonetheless, the democratic space in Ghana remains firmly under the control of the ruling National Democratic Congress, with local government only theoretically non-partisan. In the year 2000, President Rawlings is barred by the Constitution from seeking a third mandate. Opposition groups fear that the demands for investigations into past abuses cast doubts on the prospects of a smooth transition into a new era. Already, internal critics of the administration are under persecution while the regime continues to tighten its control over local government structures.[70] The proximity of Ghana to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia – which are conduits for small arms in the region and which are not on the best of terms with the Rawlings' administration – will add an incendiary element to any future confrontations.

The Gambia: arms flow dynamics

The Gambia is currently caught between conflicts in Guinea-Bissau and the secessionist war in the Casamance region of Senegal, making the country a conduit for arms smuggling in the area. The conflict in Guinea-Bissau was sparked by the illicit trafficking of truckloads of arms by security forces and government officials to the rebel *Mouvement des forces démocratique en Casamance*, which is leading a guerrilla war for independence from Senegal. It is also alleged that officials of a Chinese construction firm hired to build the Dakar stadium in 1992-94 remained in the country to form an illicit weapons trafficking network with casual workers from Guinea-Bissau who worked on the stadium project. These workers, who returned to Guinea at the end of their contracts, serve as the contacts and couriers in the Chinese-led trafficking ring.[71]

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Managing conflict in Mali: a benchmark for small arms management

In Mali, one of the poorest states in the world, a military dictatorship had overthrown the one-party system of President Modibo Keita in 1968 and launched a brutal, corrupt and incompetent rule under General Moussa Traoré. Overcentralisation, repression, graft and neglect of social infrastructure had pushed it to the brink of civil war by 1990 as students and workers clashed with armed gendarmes and soldiers.

These problems and drought had combined to force the northern nomadic Tuaregs and Arabs to flee into neighbouring countries, including Libya, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger. In Libya, the Tuareg refugees enlisted in Colonel Gaddafi's mercenary forces deployed in Chad and other countries.[72] These Libya-based Tuaregs formed a liberation movement, *Mouvement Populaire de Libération de l'Azaouad* (MPLA) in 1988. Armed with light weapons acquired in neighbouring states, MPLA launched a rebellion in June 1990.[73] The war had become messy, displacing over 200,000 civilians. As military repression intensified other nationalities in Mali formed *levées en masse* to defend their villages against banditry. One such people's militia, not unlike the Kamajors in Sierra Leone) was *Ganda Koï* (Masters of the Land), formed in May 1994[74] by sedentary Malian ethnic groups in the conflict zone. It took the overthrow of the Traoré regime in 1991 and the return to multiparty democracy in 1992 to avert an all out civil war.

Small arms management in the Mali conflict.

The new civilian administration of President Alfa Konare launched a multi-pronged diplomatic effort to resolve the conflict. It involved different levels of engagement by diverse actors: village chiefs and elders, community-based organisations, government officials, rebel representatives and neighbouring states (Algeria in particular) and NGOs. Eventually, the government and the umbrella organisation of the Tuaregs, *Mouvements et fronts Unifies de l'Azaouad* signed a peace agreement, *le Pacte National,* in April 1992, formally bringing the war to an end. However, sporadic clashes and banditry persisted, spurred on by the diffusion of small arms. Upon the invitation of President Alpha Konare in December 1993, the UN Secretary-General dispatched a fact-finding mission to

Mali. The mission concluded that the problem of illicit weapons proliferation in Mali was significant and dealing with it required a regional approach if the small arms pipeline from neighbouring states was to be blocked. In addition, it recommended the provision of a socio-economic package to address some of the root causes of conflict and human security to accompany the collection and destruction of weapons. Meeting this objective, it concluded, required 'a proportional and integrated approach to disarmament and security'[75], a formula that came to be known as the Security First approach. Pursuing the UN recommendation, the UNDP, NGOs and foreign states provided funds and logistics to:

- Grant autonomy and establish infrastructure in the north.
- Demobilise and reintegrate combatants into the national security services and civil society.

As a result of these efforts, the combatants surrendered 27,000 light weapons. These weapons were destroyed by burning in a bonfire at the 'Flame of Peace' ceremony in Timbuktu on 27 March 1996 and the remains used to erect a monument to peace[76].

The Malian experiment shows the way forward in conflict resolution and disarmament and can be successfully applied to the Casamance rebellion in Senegal and the escalating conflict in the Niger Delta of Commonwealth Nigeria.

The West Africa Moratorium

A major initiative born out of the Mali experiment was the proposal by the government of President Konare to agree a region-wide freeze on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons in West Africa. In addition, the proposal called for a regional effort to assure human security, promote and defend democracy and human rights. The idea was sold to regional leaders and multilateral organisations through conferences and quiet diplomacy. The heads of State of the 15 ECOWAS member states signed the moratorium at their summit in Abuja, Nigeria, on 31 October 1998. Though devoid of mechanisms for enforcement, this first-ever sub-regional initiative has won the support of the international community and constitutes a platform for a future democratic West Africa to control light weapons diffusion.

Conclusion

The Mali experiment in disarmament, as well as the moratorium that flowed from it, can serve a useful model in coming to grips with the small arms problem in West Africa. It is particularly tailor-made for the resolution of the Casamance problem in Senegal, given the similar histories of Senegal and Mali (both are francophone) and the similar demands of the rebels. In addition, co-operation between security forces, border guards and custom officials within ECOWAS to control illicit cross-border trafficking of arms will add urgency to the moratorium adopted by ECOWAS. Given the proliferation of private military companies and mercenaries in the region, the West African Moratorium should be broadened to include a ban on the hiring of such companies and mercenaries.

The small arms problem in the West African sub-region is complex, linked to historical, political, and socio-economic processes that have shaped the region since independence. There are internal as well as international dimensions to the problem. The resolution of conflicts and elimination of small arms from the region will require an ECOWAS composed of governments who adhere to basic principles of democracy. In addition ANAD[†], which duplicates the work of ECOMOG on a francophone mandate, should be collapsed into ECOMOG. To provide such a political framework for conflict resolution and small arms elimination, the autonomous efforts of ECOWAS member states require the support of the international community in specific ways. This is where the Commonwealth has a crucial role to play.

The role of the Commonwealth

1. Support West African democratisation beyond electoralism:

All too often the international community has equated democracy in the developing world with only the ballot box. As this chapter shows, elections alone do not create human security and a respect for human rights. At the base of conflicts in the region lies the disempowerment of vulnerable members of society. In the West African context, therefore, a key indicator of democracy must be the real devolution of power to the regions through various degrees of autonomy. Canada and the UK, two of the most powerful members of the Commonwealth, have confronted this issue in Quebec, Scotland and Wales. Their authority and experience can be brought to bear on the sub-region.

[†] Association de non-aggression et défence – a security umbrella for Francohone West Africa set up in 1976/77.

2.   Support the West African Moratorium on Small Arms:
The Commonwealth can assist ECOWAS by providing the technical capacity for monitoring compliance with arms moratorium.

3.   Help Bridge the Anglophone-Francophone Divide:
The rivalry that exists between the anglophone and francophone states, and which acts as a stumbling block in for collective efforts under ECOWAS, is a legacy of colonialism and Cold War power politics. Joint efforts by the UK and France to find solutions to regional problems will set an example to states in West Africa.

4.   Engage Libya:
No lasting solutions to the spate of coups and arms proliferation in West Africa can be successful without the involvement of Libya. Commonwealth states have enough diplomatic muscle to discourage Libyan sponsorship of destabilisation.

5.   Incorporate Micro-disarmament and Capacity-building into Technical Cooperation Packages:
Assistance should be targeted at local NGOs, as well as police and customs officials. The Commonwealth, Francophonie and ECOWAS should devise a joint plan of cross-border police/customs co-operation to enforce smuggling of arms and the West African Moratorium.

> *By no means the primary cause of instability, the easier availability of small arms nonetheless enabled particular segments of the society to decisively intervene in conflicts and change the balance of forces in their favour. There was a general and dangerous appreciation of the fact that without weapons, one could not penetrate the closed rent-seeking political system. Crucially though, the widening of access to small arms corresponded with the intensity of conflicts and with it, higher levels of violent crime.*

1 Eboe Hutchful, 'Rethinking Security in Africa', Democracy & Development, CDD Quarterly, Vol.2 Nos 1&2, January-June 1999.

2 Ventes d'armes de la France, Obervatoire des transfers d'armements, Rapport 1997, Lyons, France, 1997, p.62.

3 Daniel Fogel, *Africa in Struggle*, Ism Press, Seattle, 1982, pp.154-155.

4 Even in states where this did not occur, like in Senegal, the systems were effectively one-party as the opposition parties were given no chance whatsoever to ascend to power.

5 A-F Musah, 'A Country Under Siege', A-F Musah & J. K. Fayemi (eds), *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, Pluto Press (forthcoming, 1999)

6 In a parody Marxist classification of society into classes, Ali Mazrui described the transformation of the class within the armed forces that aspired to political power as the *lumpen-militariat*. This more aptly applies to the junior officers, many of whom could have found space for upward mobility, let alone political aspirations, in civil society. See: A. A. Mazrui, 'The Lumpen Proletariat and the Lumpen Militariat: African Soldiers as a New Political Class', *Political Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp1-12.

7 *The Guardian*, 26 September 1979, p.15

8 Credence to this assertion was given by the high ranking position given to a top executive of the leading fishing Ghanaian fishing company, a Fisheries, in the military junta.

9 Key roles in the PNDC junta and civil defence committees went to civilian cadres of the June Fourth Movement and later the National Democratic Movement.

10 The author was an observer and participant in these events.

11 The victims were: Justice Fred Sarkodie, then pregnant Mrs. Justice Cecilia Koranteng-Addo, justice Kwadwo Adjepong and Major (Retd) Sam Acquah.

12 Zaya Yeebo, *Ghana: The struggle for popular power*, New Beacon Books Ltd/Villiers Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 242.

13 Ibid. p.255.

14 Human Rights Organisations and Churches corroborated these figures.

15 See UK Home Office Figures of asylum seekers, 1989.

16 See Amos Sawyer, 'Foundations for Reconstructing Liberia', *Security, Democracy & Development in Post-War Liberia*, Report of the Centre for Democracy and Development Workshop on Liberia, London, 1998, p.64.

17 Ibid. p.7

18 *IPS* and *HURINet – The Human Rights Information Network*, 22 July 1999.

19 'Sierra Leone: Background Report on Child Soldiers', *IRIN – West Africa, irin-wa.ocha.unon.org,* 14 July 1999.

20 *IPS* and *HURINe,* ibid.

21 Zaya Yeebo, op. cit., p. 244

20 Eboe Hutchful, 'Demilitarisation in Africa: An Update', Paper presented at Conference on Leadership Challenges of Demilitarisation, Arusha, 22-24 July 1998.

23 See 'Military Expenditures in Developing Countries: Security and Development', Report of the Ottawa Symposium, Government of Canada\OECD, March 1997, p.10.

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43 A Country under siege, ibid.

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[50] , 29 March 1999.

[51] 'Small Arms create Big Casualties in World', Feature, *Xinhua,* 2 August 1999.

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Funmi Olonisakin, 'Mercenaries fill the vacuum', *The World Today*, June 1998; also, Assertion by General Arnold Quainoo, first ECOMOG Commander in Liberia.

[58] Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh toppled President Sir Dawda Jawara of the Gambia in July 1994 soon after returning from ECOMOG duty in Liberia.

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[62] Statistics produced by leading British environmentalist and writer, Andrew Rowell. See I. Okonta, 'Litmus Test', *ERActio*n, Journal of Environmental Rights Action and Friends of the Earth, Nigeria, No. 02, January-March, 1999, p.10.

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[71] Conversation in confidence with a Senegalese Army General, Dakar, July 1999.

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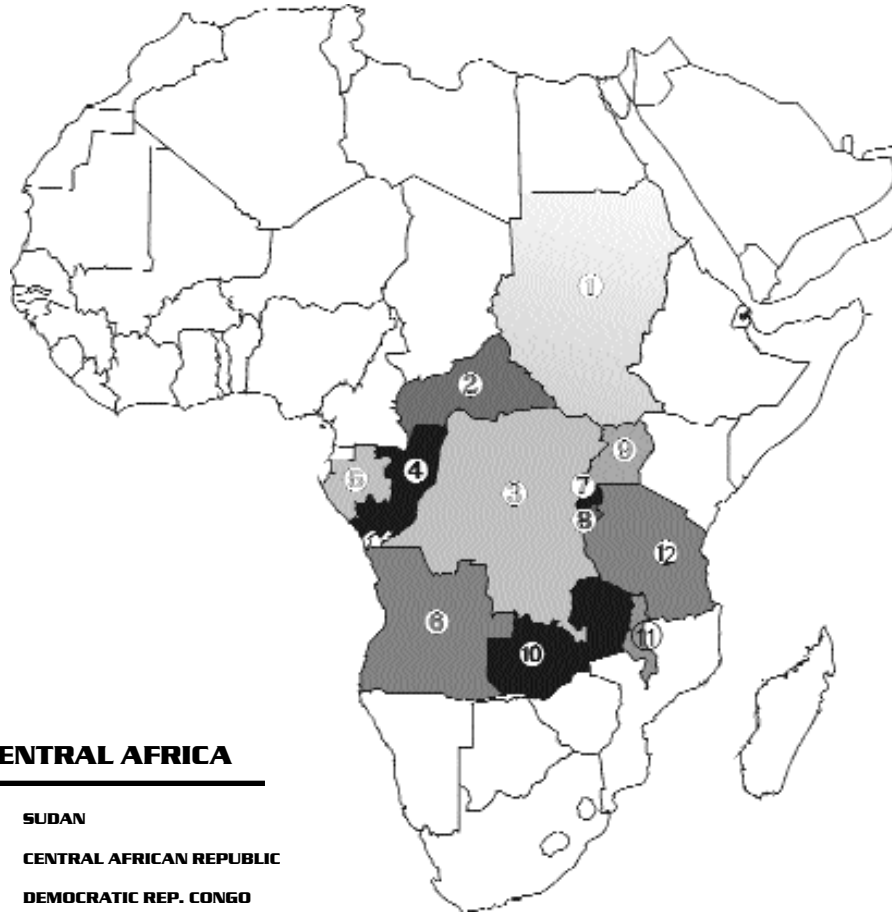
CENTRAL AFRICA

1 SUDAN

2 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

3 DEMOCRATIC REP. CONGO

4 CONGO BRAZAVILLE

5 GABON

6 ANGOLA

7 RWANDA

8 BURUNDI

9 UGANDA

10 ZAMBIA

11 MALAWI

12 TANZANIA

Mike Bourne

Light Weapons and Conflict in Central Africa

All of us whose nations sell such weapons, or through whose nations the traffic flows, bear some responsibility for turning a blind eye to the destruction they cause. And all of us have it in our power to do something in response.

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright*, Statement to the UN Security Council Ministerial on Africa, New York, 24 September 1998, as released by the Office of the Spokesman, US Department of State.*

The pervasive violence that has dominated the recent history of Central Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo) has been facilitated and exacerbated by the flow of light weapons and small arms. While much of the international attention on the issue of has focused on the so-called 'illicit' transfers, this region's conflicts are demonstrative of the need to tackle both 'legal' and 'illicit' arms transfers.

Many states and international organisations (particularly the United Nations) have been enthusiastic in pursuing measures which attempt to limit light weapons proliferation. However, much of the focus has been on the reduction of 'illicit' transfers of arms, the definitions of which have, thus-far, been lacking. Even the broadest official definition, put forward by the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, which defined 'illicit weapons trafficking' as "that international trade in conventional weapons which is contrary to the laws of States and/or international law," reflects a limited perspective on the nature of the problem.[1]

This limited perspective has been reiterated, and thus reinforced, by other proposed initiatives to reduce the flows of light weapons. In August 1998, for example, the Canadian government proposed a 'global convention prohibiting the international transfer of military small arms and light weapons to non-state actors.'[2] This proposed convention explicitly affirms some of the flawed assumptions implicit in discussions of

the illicit arms trade. This is especially true of the denial to non-state actors – insurgent armies, private militias and liberation movements – of a right to self-defence or right to use, and therefore to acquire, military-style arms. It also implies the fallacious premise that only "non-state actors" engage in the illicit use of light weapons, while states themselves are *sui generis* responsible entities. This is clearly not the case, as the complicity of Commonwealth members – South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe – in the arming of Central African conflicts, demonstrates.

The emphasis on controlling the 'illicit' arms trade alone does not reflect the reality that legal and 'illicit' arms flows are often interconnected, and both can fuel violence and facilitate the abuse of human rights. It therefore undermines the efficacy of policy responses based upon constrained discourse. While the 'illicit' arms trade is undeniably a major part of the challenge of light weapons diffusion, its adamant vilification by many states distracts from the more fundamental question of how to redesign the regulation of the arms trade in such a way as to ensure that those actors that abuse human rights, be they states or non-state groups, are denied access to the tools of oppression.

This chapter examines the conflicts that have dominated the recent history of Central Africa, and the flows of light weapons associated with them. It first provides an overview of the light weapons transfers, both 'licit' and 'illicit', which fuelled and facilitated the 1994 Rwandan genocide in order to outline the range of arms transfer processes that has contributed to regional insecurity. This insecurity became one of the key underlying factors leading to the recent outbreak of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC - formerly Zaire), which is the main focus of this chapter. The instrumental roles played by numerous African states in this conflict, including several Commonwealth members, demonstrate that while a transfer of arms may be 'licit' in terms of the criteria now espoused in established multilateral fora , it may indeed be 'illicit' in its implications for human rights.

I. A brief overview of light weapons transfers and violence in Central Africa: 1990 - 1996 [3]

Central Africa has been engulfed in a cycle of violence since 1990. The civil war in Rwanda attained genocidal proportions in 1994. This was followed by civil wars in Zaire (October 1996 - May 1997), Burundi (from October 1993), and now the Democratic

Republic of Congo (from August 1998), all producing huge death tolls and creating widespread instability, as a multitude of armed forces of varying degrees of organisation have killed, maimed and looted with impunity. Each of these conflicts shares the common ingredient of abundant flows of light weapons, small arms and ammunition, which have been the primary tools of violence. While most of the states in Central and East Africa are not members of the Commonwealth, several Commonwealth states have been implicated, to varying degrees, in the processes of light weapons proliferation and diffusion in the region. The most notable of these are Uganda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In addition, it should be noted that Rwanda is currently a candidate for Commonwealth membership.

Pre-1990 arms flows

Before 1990, arms flows to Sub-Saharan Africa were dominated by military assistance from the two superpowers to states involved in Cold War proxy conflicts, and by post-colonial relationships with France, Britain, Belgium and Portugal. In Central Africa, Zaire was a major transit point for covert US arms supplies to the *União Nacional para a Inedepência Total de Angola* (UNITA) rebels within Angola. Large quantities of weapons (both light and heavy conventional arms) and materiel were 're-supplied' to UNITA, but not before Mobutu's government had 'skimmed off' millions of dollars worth of weapons for its own forces.[4] Uganda was the other major arms recipient within this region in the pre-1990 period, primarily because of its own civil war (until 1986).[5] Arms supplied to Central Africa before 1990 continue to fuel current violence, though they may have changed hands several times since their original arrival in the region. This is a feature of the process of diffusion – because of their durability, and hence longevity, light weapons usually outlive the purpose for which they were originally supplied and are often re-circulated from one conflict to another.* The rapidity of political and social developments and the metamorphosis of armed formations in this region have accentuated this problem.

Pre-embargo arms flows: 1990 - May 1994

In October 1990 the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched an unsuccessful invasion of Rwanda from its bases in Uganda, hoping to overthrow the majority Hutu government.[6] They were backed by the Ugandan army (the National Resistance Army) which supplied various small arms

* In contrast, heavy weapons such as tanks, aircraft and missile defence systems require a comprehensive maintenance and cyclical refits, which only well-organised and well-funded military structures can support. Lacking this, heavy weapons quickly become unusable, unlike small arms such as machine guns, grenades, and land mines. (Ed.)

and light weapons. This supply occurred primarily through the alleged 'defection' of thousands of NRA soldiers and officers, many of whom were of Rwandan (ethnic Banyarwandan) origin, and had previously fought in the National Resistance Movement of Uganda that brought Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986. Ugandan support for the RPF in Rwanda appears to have been a payback for this assistance.[7] NRA soldiers reportedly constituted more than half of the RPF guerrillas and most of their officers.[8] Through these alleged defections, the NRA became the primary source of a steady supply of weapons and ammunition to the RPF, especially in the early stages of the conflict.[9]

In 1994 the RPF claimed that most of their weapons were captured from the Rwandan government forces (The FAR). While this undoubtedly did happen, the scale of acquisition of arms through capture appears to have been exaggerated. Human Rights Watch has claimed that there were a large number of AK-47s in the RPF arsenal which, while common in the Rwandan army, were "more common among Ugandan NRA forces and...widely available on the market throughout Africa."[10]

The Rwandan government forces (FAR) relied primarily on established arms supply channels and procurement processes until their overthrow in 1994. Before the outbreak of violence, Belgium, as the former colonial power, was the main supplier of arms. It was, however, constrained by its own law which prevented it from supplying military materiel once Rwanda became embroiled in violent conflict. This did not result in a reduction of arms flows to the government forces, because France stepped up its own supplies to compensate for any shortfall. France is believed to have supplied over US$6 million worth of military equipment to the Rwandan government between 1991 and 1992.[11]

France was also a major supplier of arms to the Tutsi-dominated government of Rwanda's neighbour - Burundi. It provided US$10 million worth of weapons between 1992 and 1994, a period during which violence between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi political and military elite was escalating.[12] Elections in June 1993 resulted in the defeat of President Major Pierre Buyoya. However, the victor of these elections, Melchior Ndadaye, was soon killed in a coup attempt in October 1993. This coup attempt led to renewed violence between the Tutsi-dominated military and several Hutu militias such as *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (FDD), *Parti pour la Liberation du peuple Hutu* (PALIPEHUTU), and the *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FROLINA).[13] Tanzania, and

other states of the region, responded by imposing an embargo on Burundi. However, arms flows continued, fuelling an arms race between the various factions, thereby establishing a vicious cycle of escalating violence. Other major suppliers to the various armed factions within Burundi include China, North Korea and the Russian Federation.[14] While most arms flows originated in these states, numerous other states within, or close to, Central Africa were instrumental in facilitating the supply of arms, primarily by 'permitting' transhipment through their territories. These include: Angola, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire.[15] The role of regional actors increased substantially after the imposition of arms embargoes.

As violence escalated in the region the demand for weapons from both state and non-state forces increased beyond the capacity or willingness of existing suppliers to provide them. This increased demand attracted new, and more diverse, sources of arms which supplemented existing arsenals and supply lines. The most significant arms suppliers in this period were South Africa, Egypt, China and states of the former Soviet Union. As the sources of arms diversified, the importance of transhipment through the territories of the aforementioned states increased.

The supply of arms by South Africa is a particularly important example in the context of this book. South Africa has a large arms industry in which the production of light weapons and small arms is a speciality; during the Apartheid era it was consistently a major supplier of light weapons to armed conflicts in Central and Southern Africa. This unique heritage allowed private South African arms dealers to supply a wide range of African armed groups perfectly legally. In October 1992, for example, US$5.9 million worth of cheap South African light weapons were delivered to the Rwandan government.[16] This shipment appears to have included: 1.5 million rounds of ammunition, over 20,000 high explosive grenades, 10,000 M26 fragmentation grenades, seventy hand-held grenade launchers and 100 60mm M1 mortars.[17] In addition, by 1994, the FAR were in possession of approximately 3,000 South African made 5.56mm R-4 automatic rifles.[18] Since the end of Apartheid in 1994, South Africa's role as an arms exporter has undergone significant changes, but remains an important element in regional arms flows. (See Box 2).

Escalating violence and the imposition of arms embargoes: 1994 - 1996
In 1993 and 1994, large-scale violence broke out in Burundi and Rwanda, reaching genocidal proportions in the latter.

The United Nations imposed an arms embargo on Rwanda in May 1994 (which remained in force until September 1996),[19] and Tanzania imposed a unilateral arms embargo on Burundi in June of the same year. While the imposition of these embargoes failed to curtail arms flows into and within Central Africa, it did contribute to some significant changes in the form these flows took.

Genocide in Rwanda

It is now apparent that the genocidal violence that engulfed Rwanda in the months following the death of President Habyarimana (April 1994) had been planned for several years. The *Interahamwe* militia and sections of the government had systematically laid the foundations of communal violence. A key element of this preparation was the import and distribution of automatic weapons and machetes to Hutu militias and civilians.[20]

In just one of many incidents:

2,800 people gathered in a church were slaughtered by militiamen using automatic rifles, machine guns, grenades and machetes. As people fled, it took the militia four hours to kill them all.[21]

There were no safe-havens: Schools; churches; refugee camps; all were targeted. Thousands of people were rounded up by 'soldiers' using automatic weapons, and then massacred by militias and civilians. Over a three and a half month period, up to 1,000,000 people were brutally killed. Their bodies piled into mass graves or dumped into rivers which ran red with blood.

A common method of killing is to throw a grenade into a building or crowded area, then finish off survivors with machete blows to the head - a method which kills less rapidly than might be imagined. Some people are allowed to survive so that they can throw the bodies into a well: they are then ordered to jump into the well, too. People arriving many days later have discovered seriously injured villagers still alive on top of the pile of bodies at the bottom of the well.[22]

The common myth that the genocide was spontaneous ethnic bloodletting carried out with whatever implements were at hand has distracted attention from the fact that the violence was planned and carried out with weapons imported for just that purpose. The supply of these weapons was facilitated by states and arms dealers both within and outside of the Central Africa region.

- **More circuitous and covert supply routes:**

Formal government to government transfers appeared to dry up, but often simply went underground. Covert arms transfers usually take more circuitous routes in order to evade detection. French arms transfers, for example, were diverted to Goma airport in Zaire and then taken across the border into Rwanda by members of the Zairian military. This was both because of the embargo and the insecurity of transferring arms to Kigali during high levels of violence. Five shipments of arms and ammunition from France were reportedly transported in this way to the FAR in May and June of 1994.[23]

- **Further diversification of sources and new supply routes:**

Private networks of arms supply usually 'fill the vacuum' when official government to government supplies dry up following the imposition of an arms embargo. This was certainly the case when the Burundian government became "stigmatised and, in time, faced regional sanctions."[24] Human Rights Watch claimed that:

> *Arms networks serving armed parties to the civil war in Burundi have overlapped with pre-existing and newly operating networks that function largely out of Europe and the former Soviet Union. Since some of these pipelines are well established, the opportunity for acquiring weapons by Burundians has been greatly enhanced.[25]*

With the ouster of the Rwandan Hutu government in August 1994, the ex-FAR and Interahamwe militia were exiled along with hundreds of thousands of refugees. Burundian Hutu groups, often active or based in areas close to large populations of exiled Rwandan Hutus, found themselves with eager comrades at their doorstep. The exiled Rwandan forces are rumoured to have supplied the FDD with South African R4 rifles (possibly some of the same rifles transferred in 1992) German G3 rifles, and Russian RPG-7 and RPG-4 rocket launchers, and also trained the FDD to use them.[26] In addition to direct exchanges between these Hutu groups, it seems that both rely on the same arms supply channels, many of which originate in China.[27]

Reciprocally, the RPF government of Rwanda is believed to have supported the Burundian government forces. This, not unlike the Ugandan support for the RPF, appears to have occurred through the defection of government forces. In this case, they were claimed to have joined a Tutsi militia in Burundi, known as *Sans Echec*.[28]

- **'Black market' arms flows and the changing role of states:**

The role of states in the supply of weapons changed from direct sales or assistance to the facilitation of 'black market' transfers. This facilitation took many forms including transhipment, the provision of false documentation, the negotiation of arms deals, and brokering. One key example involves the unwitting sale of arms to the former Rwandan government forces in refugee camps in Zaire by the government of the Seychelles, a member of the Commonwealth. In 1994, a former Rwandan government defence official, Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, purchased a large number of light weapons that had been seized by the government of the Seychelles in 1993 when it discovered that the arms were bound for the embargoed state of Somalia.[29] Bagasora was acting, ostensibly, on behalf of the Zairian government and held a Zairian passport and end-user certificate. Two consignments landed in Goma on 16 and 18 June 1994, and were transhipped to the Rwandan Hutu armed forces and militia, and a third was stopped by the Seychelles authorities when they became aware of their true destination. This deal was arranged by Bagosora in partnership with William Ehlers, a South African ex-Presidential aide, after the South African government refused to supply the FAR direct, but agreed to help facilitate arms shipments from other parties.[30]

Ugandan officials have also been involved in the transhipment of arms to Burundian government forces and Tutsi militias. Members of the Ugandan and Tanzanian military have taken delivery of Chinese-supplied arms at the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam, which has been called 'China's port in Africa' and escorted them while they were being transported through Tanzanian and Ugandan territory.[31] Ugandan military personnel have also stored arms shipments in military-controlled areas at Entebbe airport until they could be transported to their final destination. It should be noted that the escorting of arms shipments by Tanzanian officials was in direct contravention of the Tanzanian government's stated position embodied in the unilateral arms embargo.

Commonwealth members, Mozambique, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa are also rumoured to have served as transhipment points for illicit transfers. Arms and ammunition produced in South Africa, Uganda and Kenya have also been supplied to the Rwandan and Burundian conflicts:

- **South Africa:** Specialises in the production of light weapons, and has a long-standing arms supply relationship with Rwanda (See Box 2).
- **Uganda:** Weapons, landmines and ammunition produced in the Chinese-built Nakasongola arms factory in Gulu (northern Uganda) have been supplied to

Burundian combatants, though it is unclear whether this was sanctioned by the Ugandan government.[32] South African arms production experts have also been involved in this supply: in May 1997, South African experts replaced the Chinese and North Korean technicians at the facility. It is not clear whether these South African experts were working freelance or were sponsored by their government.

- **Kenya:** Approximately 5 million rounds of ammunition produced in a Kenyan factory in Eldoret (which was built under license from FN-Herstal of Belgium), somehow found their way into the hands of Hutu militias.[33] There is little evidence of state collusion in this supply, but it is likely that some elements within Kenya helped to facilitate the supply of ammunition, whether through inadequate controls over stockpiles or by more direct complicity.

A fourth Commonwealth state, Zimbabwe, has produced large amounts of military materiel, including ammunition, which has been supplied to the two rebellions in Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Most arms transfers to Central Africa since the mid-1990s have come from private or semi-private sources in Eastern Europe, China, Southern Africa, and more recently, North Korea. In the majority of cases regional states were involved, sometimes unwittingly, in facilitating the transfer of arms.

II. Rebellion in Zaire and the prelude to "Africa's First Regional War"

After the exile of the ex-FAR and Interahamwe from Rwanda, violence in the region continued, but on a different, and much larger, scale. In the refugee camps in northern Tanzania and, especially, eastern Zaire, the exiled Hutu extremists rearmed and often forcibly recruited new members from the displaced population, a clear abuse of human rights. Zairian soldiers were reportedly selling weapons to ex-FAR and Interahamwe in refugee camps, thereby facilitating the expansion of these extremist Hutu forces and fuelling increased cross-border raids.[34]

In October 1996, the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Liberátion du Congo* (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila, launched a campaign to seize power in Zaire, which ended successfully in May 1997.[35] Kabila then changed the name of the state to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kabila's forces were backed by the Ugandan

Arms trade: South Africa vs Tanzania

Most arms sales by South African state companies and private dealers have been perfectly legal, but also clearly immoral in terms of supplying the means of violence to warring parties which have abused human rights. Over 164 million rand (approximately £17 million) worth of arms were exported between 1996 and 1998 to Central African states and other states involved in the DRC conflict.[36] This includes almost 31 million Rand (approximately £3.3 million) worth of arms to the government of Rwanda.[37] Although much of this can be attributed to the purchase of four Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs),[38] a substantial proportion was in small arms (£180,000) and light weapons (figures unknown).[39]

It should be noted, however, that while South Africa has played a significant role in supplying arms to African conflict zones, it has recently improved its position and declared a policy of destroying, rather than reselling surplus small arms.[40]

In direct contrast, the Commonwealth state of Tanzania, which has been a major transhipment point for arms flows to neighbouring conflicts, has recently announced plans to liberalise its gun laws. The move, which will allow private firms to import and sell firearms and explosives more easily, has been widely condemned. A former senior police officer has predicted that the increased availability of firearms to civilians will lead to an increase in the incidence of armed crime, while NGOs in neighbouring states claim that the Tanzanian government is "sowing the seeds of violence for the 21st century."[41] Indeed the liberalisation of arms import regulations in a state which has been the entry point for many arms transfers to Central African conflict zones is likely to increase the ease with which arms enter the continent and flow to the numerous conflicts and sub-conflicts in the region.

government, which allegedly provided the AFDL with arms recently acquired from South Africa.[42] The Rwandan government provided the AFDL with troops, partly in an effort to reduce cross-border attacks by the ex-FAR and Interahamwe. While Uganda and Rwanda provided a significant amount of the AFDL's soldiers, Zimbabwe provided

much of their arsenal. In April 1997, Zimbabwe supplied the AFDL with substantial amounts of arms and ammunition; estimates of the value of these arms shipments range from US$40 million to US$200 million.[43] Most of the arms appear to have been surplus weapons originally from North Korea, while the ammunition was manufactured by the state owned Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI), which specialises in landmines and ammunition.[44] Zimbabwe also provided the AFDL with food rations, uniforms and boots from the disbanded Sixth Brigade of the Zimbabwean army.*

Many other states provided arms and ammunition to Zaire/the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These included: Angola, the government of which is believed to have supported Kabila's rebels, while UNITA allegedly armed and fought for Mobutu; Bulgaria; Chad, which allegedly sent arms provided by Libya, and Chinese arms from Sudan, to Mobutu's forces;[45] China; the Czech Republic; France; North Korea; Rwanda; South Africa; Sudan; the former Yugoslavia, including Serbian mercenaries fighting for Mobutu;[46] Uganda; Uzbekistan; and Zambia.

On capturing power, Kabila formed a new state military, the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC), which was composed of some former members of the FAZ, AFDL fighters, and a substantial number of Rwandan soldiers, particularly in the higher positions.[47] Kabila's government purchased a large amount of weapons, particularly from China.[48] There is also evidence that shipments of small arms and mortars were made to the AFDL government in May and June 1997.[49]

Violence persisted throughout Kabila's early period in power, with an ad-hoc coalition of ex-FAZ, ex-FAR, Interahamwe and Burundian Hutu rebels engaging in violence against government forces under the banner of the "Mai-Mai", particularly after December 1997.[50] Anti-Kabila rebels reportedly obtained arms from diverse sources, including Morocco, Togo, Sudan and France.[51] This violence contributed to insecurity in eastern DRC which, combined with the fracturing of the Kabila-Rwandan alliance, contributed to the outbreak of the current civil war that began in 1998.

III. Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

While the DRC is not a Commonwealth state, several African members of the Commonwealth have become deeply entangled in this conflict, now dubbed "Africa's First World War."[52] This ominous title derives from the widespread

* Such transfers of arms and equipment made surplus by the demobilisation of state forces is a common feature of the diffusion of light weapons.

involvement of other African states, a reality which has direct and significant importance for the security of much of sub-Saharan Africa.

The conflict in the DRC broke out on 2 August 1998 in Kivu, near the Rwandan border - the same region from where the ADFL rebellion that brought Kabila to power was launched. The main indigenous rebel group, the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie* (RCD), began as an ad-hoc alliance of rebels led by former history professor Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, united more by opposition to Kabila than any broader political agenda. The RCD was officially formed a day before the rebellion was launched, and its forces were composed primarily of Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi) and many other members of the FAC who had defected.[53] They are supported and supplemented by the armed forces of Rwanda and Uganda which have been instrumental in the conduct and progress of the rebellion.[54]

The Banyamulenge are ethnic Tutsi who have lived in the Congo since before the end of colonial rule. Under Kabila, as under Mobutu, they were denied Congolese citizenship, in spite of the fact that they were an integral part of the ADFL and the reformed FAC.[55] Kabila continued a process of 'ethnic cleansing' against the Banyamulenge while at the same time denying human rights observers and the UN access to the DRC in order to ascertain the validity of mass murder allegations. [56]

After these defections the FAC was composed of the 'Katangan Tigers', many of whom came from Angola during the 1996 rebellion and who have tended to remain loyal to Kabila, supplemented by members of the FAZ who did not defect with their brothers-in-arms. The loss of many of the more experienced members of the FAC forced Kabila to embark on a program of recruitment which expanded the ranks of the so called 'kadogos', youthful and poorly trained soldiers who lacked experience. The comparative inexperience of the bulk of the FAC required Kabila to forge new alliances with the numerous Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian rebel groups active in Congo. This brought a battle-hardened element to his forces, but also heightened the concerns of his eastern neighbours. In addition, Kabila manipulated anti-Tutsi sentiment in Congo, based on the perception that the war is a Rwandan invasion. In a call first issued on the 25th of August 1998, but echoed many times since, he laid the foundations for the formation of the *Défense Civile et Populaire* (People's Civil Defence Forces), by saying that "People in the villages must take up arms, traditional weapons, arrows and spears, to crush the enemy or we will become slaves of the Tutsi."[57]

An undisclosed number of Rwandan and Ugandan forces were deployed to the DRC and led the initial campaigns by the rebels which rapidly took control of Kivu and moved westwards towards Kinshasa. Increasing attacks by the expanded forces of the ex-FAR and Interahamwe, reportedly facilitated by Kabila, were the main rationale for Rwanda's leading role in the new rebellion. Uganda too, was motivated by concerns about anti-Museveni forces operating from rear bases in the DRC. Both Rwanda and Uganda appear also to have been motivated by the temptation of economic spoils – diamond-mining concessions, for example – as were Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia, which have intervened on behalf of Kabila.

The rebel forces, with significant backing from Rwanda and Uganda, rapidly moved across the DRC and within a matter of weeks were threatening the capital, Kinshasa.[58] It seems that after the capture of Kisangani, the second largest town in DRC, Uganda sent additional troops to control the airport.[59] It seemed they would take Kinshasa with ease, a development which the Rwandan and Ugandan governments had apparently anticipated.[60] However, Kabila's appeal to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for help was heeded at the eleventh hour and this dramatically affected the course of the conflict.

The DRC is a new member of the SADC, and is therefore linked to other member states by a defence agreement. After some initial vacillation, three SADC states responded to his call for assistance in August 1998. It should be noted that while the military interventions by these three states were initially organised through the SADC, the SADC itself was divided over the form and method of support for Kabila, and other members took a more neutral stance.[61] The first state to intervene on Kabila's behalf was Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, reportedly partly motivated by the prospect of gaining a foothold in the resource-rich DRC.[62] The number of Zimbabwean troops sent to the DRC has thus-far been shrouded in secrecy, though most

Kabila continued a process of 'ethnic cleansing' against the Banyamulenge while at the same time denying human rights observers and the UN access to the DRC in order to ascertain the validity of mass murder allegations.

estimates of the initial force indicate around 1,000 troops,[63] rising to current levels of approximately 14,000.[64]

Angola and Namibia quickly followed Zimbabwe in supporting Kabila's government. Angola sent approximately 5,000 troops and some heavy military equipment such as Mig jet fighters, which proved instrumental in repelling the rebel advance and recapturing lost territory.[65] The Angolan government, like the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, intervened in the conflict partly because of military security concerns related to the UNITA rebels, which had long had rear bases in Zaire, via which they had been supplied with large quantities of arms. Namibia, a Commonwealth member, has reportedly sent a significant amount of arms, but far fewer troops (approximately 100 men), and like Zimbabwe and Namibia, while not being directly threatened by the rebels, has intervened for primarily economic reasons[66] Chad was the next to enter the fray, in early September, by sending troops, reportedly numbering 2,227, to fight for Kabila in northern DRC against Ugandan forces[67] The Chadian intervention was financed by Libya, which also provided transport to the DRC for the Chadian troops.[68]

The military support from these states for President Kabila pushed the rebels back, and resulted in the recapture of much of the lost territory. Some key developments since September 1998 have reshaped the nature of these alliances, but the violence is continuing, with neither side appearing likely to be victorious in the near future.

IV. Current situation and the prospects for peace

On the 29th of May 1999 Rwanda declared a unilateral ceasefire in the DRC.[69] However, the Zimbabwean government has claimed that Rwanda sent 7,000 fresh troops to the DRC as the battle for the diamond-rich area of Mbuji-Mayi escalated.[70] Zimbabwe claims that its recent deployment of 3,000 more troops, most of which are raw recruits fresh from training, was a response to this.[71] The Angolan government has also recently sent 1000 additional troops to DRC.[72] Nevertheless, the current military situation favours the rebels.[73] About one third of DRC is under rebel control, mainly in the north and east,[74] and recently, the three main rebel groups, the two RCD factions and the MNLC, have made moves to increase co-operation both militarily and politically. For example, a committee has been formed to look at ways in which their military forces could be merged in order to present a more united. [75]

The arming of militias by the Kabila government has also accelerated recently. Kabila's government has apparently been arming large sections of the civilian population, particularly around the Katanga region since the start of 1999, in the hope of supporting his 'hard-pressed army' with a "peoples war".[76] It is estimated that as many as 6,600 young men and women were armed and trained at a centre in Kanyama-Kasese in northwest Katanga between January and June 1999.[77] The deliberate arming of civilians has been a common practice in many intra-state conflicts including Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and now the DRC. In each of these cases the arming of civilians contributed significantly to the diffusion of arms throughout societies, which in turn has undermined post-conflict peace-building and economic development.

Peace talks are ongoing at the time of writing, and have been beset with difficulties. Escalations in the conflict, and the numerous entrenched business interests which are resistant to a negotiated settlement, also represent a challenge to peace. With increased force deployments, and programs of arms acquisition, it appears that they key actors in the conflict are preparing for continued violence for some time to come. In spite of a ceasefire agreement signed by the main conflict parties (except for the indigenous rebel groups) in Lusaka (Zambia) in July 1999, the prospects for sustainable peace and development are extremely uncertain, especially in an environment where high levels of arms diffusion undermine stability, development and the respect for human rights.

Conclusion

Both legal and illicit arms flows have fuelled conflict and social violence, including genocide, in Central Africa. The current conflict in DRC has seen a significant change in the role of states in the region. Before and during the Rwandan genocide and the Burundian conflict, most neighbouring states played a significant but limited role in fuelling the violence, with the exception of Uganda and Zaire (which played a far larger role, usually through permitting or participating in the transhipment of arms from East Asian and European sources). Since 2 August 1998, however, numerous African states have deeply involved themselves in direct military action.

Actors – both states and private organisations – from within and outside the region have contributed to the violence in those states. Their roles, whether direct or indirect, have usually been linked to the flow of arms, whether through trade, transhipment, or military

intervention. These arms flows have been both legal and illicit, and have all contributed to human rights abuses, particularly the killing of civilians. The conflicts in this region have undermined development by displacing large segments of the population (660,000 internally displaced within the DRC as of June 1999),[78] creating an insecure environment, and draining the finances of all states directly involved.

It seems that there are still elements who wish to see the war in the DRC pursued to the point of a decisive victory for one side or another. There appear to be two main reasons for this. First and foremost, it seems that a false belief in the efficacy of violent means to pursuing political and economic goals has permeated the thinking of ordinary people and leaders alike. This has contributed to the diffusion of light weapons, which in turn reinforces this erroneous assumption. The second (linked) reason is expressed succinctly in David Shearer's claim that: "War might be a drain on a country's economy, but it is highly profitable for elites and their families. And if war can provide access to new wealth, that wealth can be a powerful disincentive to resolve conflict."[79]

Those who wish to pursue their goals through violence, or the facilitation of violence through arms supplies, should learn from the experiences of Rwanda and Burundi where large scale violence has left a legacy of undermined security and economic development. For example, the mainly subsistence economy of Burundi is estimated to have contracted by 25 percent over the last five years.[80] In Rwanda, insecurity has remained endemic with light weapons widely diffused throughout the population. The reintegration of former combatants and the reconstruction of the economy is a long-term challenge dogging the new RPF government. Indeed the displacement of large numbers of Rwandans provided the seed-bed for the cross-border raids which precipitated Rwanda's involvement in the current conflict.

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The diffusion of light weapons in Central Africa has contributed to endemic violence, insecurity, underdevelopment and the abuse of human rights. This diffusion stems from both legal and illicit arms transfers from earlier conflicts. More recent arms flows have added to this diffusion and are likely to continue to destabilise the region for many years to come. This instability, in turn, is likely to hamper development initiatives and contribute to continued human rights abuses witnessed in all of the large-scale conflicts in Central Africa.

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In spite of a ceasefire agreement signed by the main conflict parties (except for the indigenous rebel groups) in Lusaka (Zambia) in July 1999, the prospects for sustainable peace and development are extremely uncertain, especially in an environment where high levels of arms diffusion undermine stability, development and the respect for human rights.

[1] UN, *Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms*, (New York, United Nations, July 1997), p 24, paragraph 56.

[2] See Canadian Foreign Ministry, *Discussion Paper: A proposed global convention prohibiting the international transfer of military small arms and light weapons to non state actors*, August 1998.

[3] For a longer account of light weapons transfers into and within the Great Lakes see Bourne, Mike, *Light Weapons Flows in the Great Lakes Sub-Region of Central Africa*, pp 5 - 10 in: Greene, Owen; Bourne; Mike; Gardener, Victoria; & Louise, Christopher, *Light Weapons and Peacebuilding in Central and East Africa,* (London, International Alert, 1998).

[4] See Mathiak, Lucy, *Light Weapons and Internal Conflict in Angola*, pp 81 - 97 in Boutwell, Jeffrey; Klare, Michael T; & Reed, Laura W; *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons,* (Cambridge (Massachusetts), American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995), p 89.

[5] Benson, William, *Undermining Development: The European arms trade with the Horn of Africa and Central Africa*, (London, Novib & Saferworld, February 1998), pp 8 - 9.

[6] In contrast, heavy weapons such as tanks, aircraft and missile defence systems require a comprehensive maintenance and cyclical refits, which only well-organised and well-funded military structures can support. Lacking this, heavy weapons quickly become unusable, unlike small arms such as machine guns, grenades, and land mines. (Ed.)

[7] Hutu and Tutsi ethnic identities have a long history, reaching back to pre-colonial times. These identities were also social 'class' like divisions, and were exacerbated and politicised by manipulative political leaders, particularly the Habyarimana government, in order to consolidate and retain a support base.

[8] *EMERGING MAPS: Africa scrambles for Africa*, pp 1 - 6 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 40 Number 1, 8th January 1999, p 2.

[9] Goose, Stephen D., & Smyth, Frank, *Arming Genocide in Rwanda*, in Foreign Affairs, September/October 1994, Volume 73, Part 5, pp 86 - 96.

[10] It should be noted that a steady and reliable supply line is extremely important for an insurgent force fighting in a protracted conflict, thus adding further significance to Ugandan support for the RPF.

[11] Human Rights Watch Arms Project*, Arming Rwanda: The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War*, (New York, Human Rights Watch, January 1994), p 22.

[12] African Rights, *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance: Revised Edition*, (London, African Rights, August 1995), p 67.

[13] Human Rights Watch Arms Project*, Stoking the Fires: Military Assistance and Arms Trafficking in Burundi*, (London, Human Rights Watch, 1997), p 46.

[14] See *Hutu guerrillas*, p 2 in *Africa Confidential*, Volume 37, Number 15, 19 July 1996; and Amnesty International, *BURUNDI: Struggle for Survival: Immediate action vital to stop killings*, Amnesty International Report AFR 16/07/95, (London, Amnesty International, 1995), p 6.

[15] Ibid, p 2.

[16] Ibid, pp 2 - 3.

[17] Human Rights Watch Arms Project*, Arming Rwanda: The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War*, op - cit, p 16.

[18] Ibid, p 27.

[19] Public Education Center, *CENTRAL AFRICA: The Influx of Arms and the Continuation of Crisis: A Background Report for Journalists*, May 1998, at http://ww.publicedcenter.org/nsns/africa/index.html, p 59.

[20] Human Rights Watch Arms Project, *Arming Rwanda: The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War*, op - cit, p 16.

[21] See Peter Batchelor's submission in this report. (Ed.)

[22] Goose, Stephen D., & Smyth, Frank, op - cit, p 91.

[23] *Rwanda: Civilian slaughter*, pp 5 - 6 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 35, Number 9, 6 May 1994, p 5.

[24] Benson, William, op - cit, p 13.

[25] Human Rights Watch Arms Project, *Rwanda/Zaire: Rearming with Impunity: International Support for the Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide*, (New York, Human Rights Watch, May 1995), pp 6 - 7.

[26] Human Rights Watch Arms Project, *Stoking the Fires: Military Assistance and Arms Trafficking in Burundi*, op - cit, p 35.

[27] Ibid, p 35. See also UN, *Third Report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda),* (New York, United Nations, October 1996), p 30, paragraph 92.

[28] *BURUNDI: Intervention on the agenda*, pp 1- 3 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 37, Number 15, 19 July 1996, p 1; and *BURUNDI: Militants' mayhem*, pp 5 - 6 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 36, Number 4, 17 February 1995, p 6.

[29] *BURUNDI: Conflict irresolution*, pp 5 - 6, in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 39, Number 5, 6 March 1998, p 6. See also, *BURUNDI: Intervention on the agenda*, Ibid, p 3.

[30] *THE GREAT LAKES: The political poison spreads*, pp 1 - 2 in *Africa Confidential*, Volume 37, Number 9, 26 April 1996, p 2.

[31] These arms included 2,500 AK-47s, 6,000 Mortars and 5,000 fragmentation grenades. See Boggan, Steve, *Operation Insecticide: Bloody trade that fuels Rwanda's war*, in The Independent, 23 November 1996.

[32] Despite this refusal several planeloads of arms were flown from South Africa to the Kivu region in Zaire (near the ex-FAR camps), in February and March 1995. The details of the contents of these shipments are not known.

[33] Human Rights Watch, *Stoking the Fires: Military Assistance and Arms Trafficking in Burundi*, op - cit, pp 66 - 68.

[34] Ibid, pp 67 - 68.

[35] Ibid, p 39, footnote 62.

[36] More than half of this amount was supplied to the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). See Directorate Conventional Arms Control (DCAC*), Annual Report: South African Export Statistics for Conventional Arms - 1998,* at http://www.mil.za/SANDF/DRO/NCACC/ncacc.html.

[37] Rwanda also received a further 8,834,000 Rand worth of support equipment. See Ibid.

[38] Chalmers, Malcolm, & Greene, Owen, *Bradford Arms Register Studies: Working Paper 6: A Maturing Regime?: The UN Register in its Sixth Year*, (Bradford, Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, 1999), p 14.

[39] DCAC, op - cit,

[40] Deen, Thalif, *DISARMAMENT: South Africa Leads Effort to Curb Small Arms*, 21 January 1999, distributed by the Inter Press Service at

http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/jan99/03_00_001.html.

[41] *THE GREAT LAKES: The political poison spreads,* op - cit, p 1.

[42] Human Rights Watch, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Uncertain Course: Transition and Human Rights Violations in the Congo,* (New York, Human Rights Watch, December 1997), p 4.

[43] Public Education Center, op - cit, p 51. See also, *ZIMBABWE: Boeing bellyflops,* p 8, in *Africa Confidential*, Volume 38, Number 8, 11 April 1997.

[44] Reyntjens, Filip, *BRIEFING: The Second Congo War: More than a remake,* pp 241 - 250 in *African Affairs,* Volume 98, Number 391, April 1999, p 248, fn 14.

[45] *Zim arms used to topple Mobutu,* in *The Zimbabwe Independent,* 22 August 1997.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *C.A.R./CONGO-KINSHASA: More contras,* p 8 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 39, Number 4, 20 February 1998.

[48] Human Rights Watch, *Zaire: Transition, War and Human Rights,* (New York, Human Rights Watch, April 1997), p 20.

[49] IISS, *The Military Balance: 1997/8,* (London, IISS, 1997), p 234, and Public Education Center, *op - cit,* pp 49 - 52.

[50] *Central Africa II: Military muddling,* pp 4 - 6, in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 39, Number 4, 20 February 1998, pp 4 - 5.

[51] Ibid, p 5.

[52] *Congo-Kinshasa: Paid fighters - and their paymasters,* pp 1- 3 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 38, Number 13, 20 June 1997, p 3.

[53] US Agency for International Development (USAID), *Great Lakes Situation Report 1998: Democratic Republic of the Congo,* (Washington D.C., USAID, January 1998). See also Collins, Carole J.L., *Briefing: Congo/Ex-Zaire: Through the Looking Glass,* pp 112 - 123 in *Review of African Political Economy,* Number 75, March 1998.

[54] *CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: French leave,* pp 6 - 7 in *Africa Confidential,* Volume 38, Number 20, 10th October 1997, p

[55] Shearer, David, *Africa's Great War,* pp 89 - 106 in *Survival,* Volume 41, Number 2, Summer 1999, p 89. Citing a comment by Susan E. Rice, US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, in Duke, Lynne , *Congo Allies Beef Up Anti-Guerrilla Forces,* in the *Washington Post,* 24 October 1998, p A 12.

[56] International Crisis Group, *Africa's Seven Nation War,* 21 May 1999 at http://www.crisisweb.org.

[57] Ibid.

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[59] International Crisis Group, *Congo at War: A Briefing on the Internal and External Players in the Central African Conflict,* 17 November 1998 at http://www.crisisweb.org.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Simpson, Chris, *Who is Fighting Whom,* p 19 in *BBC Focus on Africa,* January - March 1999.

[62] International Crisis Group, *Africa's Seven Nation War,* op - cit.

[63] *INTERNATIONAL: A hard war to stop - or win,* pp 75 - 76, in *The Economist,* December 5th 1998, p 76.

[64] de Coning, Cedric, *Why the SADC intervened,* pp 766 - 767 in *West Africa,* 19 October - 1 November 1998.

[65] Shearer, David, op - cit, p 97.

[66] Abdulai, Napoleon, *The key players,* pp 752 & 765 in *West Africa,* 19 October - 1 November, p 752.

[67] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), *ZIMBABWE: More troops to the DRC,* in *Southern Africa: IRIN News Briefs,* 24 June 1999.

[68] Abdulai, Napoleon, *op - cit,* p 752.

[69] International Crisis Group, *Africa's Seven Nation War*, op - cit.

[70] IRIN, *Chad said to be supporting Kabila,* IRIN-DRC, 24/9/1998. & IRIN, *DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: Over 100 Chadians died,* IRIN-CEA Update No 695, 17 June 1999.

[71] See International Crisis Group Reports, op - cit.

[72] IRIN, *DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: Rwanda criticises Zimbabwe for reinforcing troops in DRC,* in *IRIN-CEA Update No. 701 for Central and Eastern Africa,* 25th June 1999.

[73] *DR CONGO: Guerrillas fall out,* p 9 in *BBC Focus on Africa,* July - September 1999.

[74] IRIN, *DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: IRIN chronology (as of 9 June 1999),* op - cit.
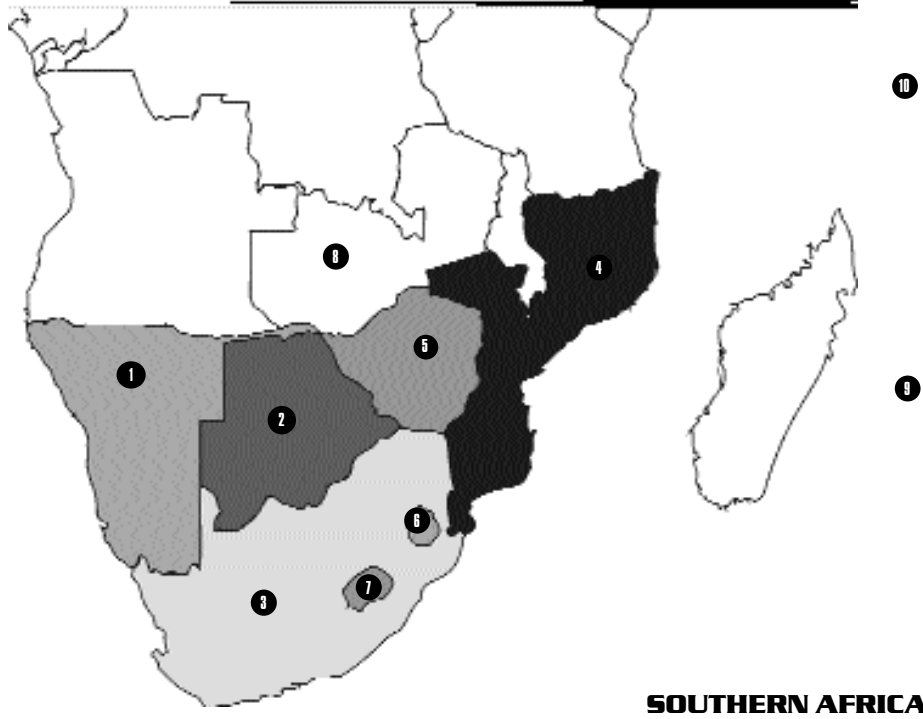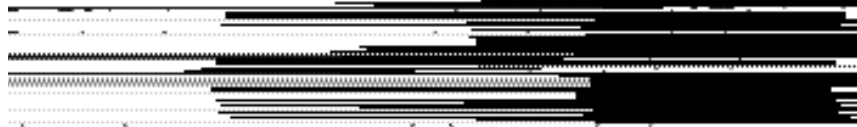
[75] Ochieng, Levi, op – cit.

[76] *Group Fears Arming of Civilians in Kabila's Congo,* Reuters, 25 March 1999.

[77] Ibid.

[78] IRIN, 660,000 people displaced, in IRIN-CEA Weekly Round-up 25 covering the period 19-25 June 1999.

[79] Shearer, David, op – cit, p 98.

[80] World Bank, *World Bank Burundi Profile,* at http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/offrep/afr/bi2.html.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

1 NAMIBIA
2 BOTSWANA
3 SOUTH AFRICA
4 MOZAMBIQUE
5 ZIMBABWE
6 SWAZILAND
7 LESOTHO
8 ZAMBIA
9 SEYCHELLES
10 MAURITIUS

Sarah Meek

New Democracies Under the Gun:
Small Arms in Southern Africa

Ultimately, the security of fractured African societies can only come from within, through the creation by domestic actors of some framework of order that enables them to survive, and with any luck develop, in some reasonably peaceful way.

Christopher Clapham *(1999)*[1]

In countries undergoing post-conflict reconstruction, the easy availability of left-over weapons can hinder efforts to foster stability and development. The reasons behind this are relatively clear: weapons become tools for violence, crime and coercion and also commodities for sale or barter. While weapons are themselves a problem in many post-conflict countries, they are also a symptom of deeper instability within the state. Frustrations can, with easy recourse to light weapons, be transformed into political violence and random violent crime. These developments perpetuate a cycle in which insecurity leads to greater accumulations of arms and higher rates of arms possession in turn breed insecurity. This situation is exacerbated where the state's guarantee of security for its citizens is tenuous – or non-existent – and democracy, governance and respect for human rights become negotiable in the face of insecurity and fear. The countries of Southern Africa[2] which belong to the Commonwealth (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) represent a comprehensive cross-section of situations where the overabundance of weapons has hampered efforts to provide for the security of citizens and where, in the extreme, the threat or use of armed violence violated peoples' human rights. Now, many of the states in Southern Africa are having to respond to the proliferation of guns while simultaneously struggling to recreate themselves as responsible regimes, able to ensure the rights of all their citizens.

Weapons are most destabilising in countries on the verge of "collapsing inward" or "exploding outward". In these cases, weapons are used by the weak, the strong or the corrupt to ensure self-defense, maintain an advantage, or exploit a situation. In addition, in countries emerging from conflict, the ownership of weapons is not only a security issue, but also one based on economic imperatives. Ex-combatants who have been demobilised but poorly reintegrated into the community they left, have turned to using weapons for economic survival through robbery or the exchange of weapons for money or food.

Weapons in South Africa are no longer solely possessed by security forces or a small minority of civilians. They can be bought, traded or stolen on street corners in cities or along the borders of countries at war. It is in this context – where weapons are beyond the control of the state – that we must look at small arms proliferation in Africa, where a focus on one sub-region in particular - Southern Africa - can give a perspective to the challenges of the continent. Southern Africa provides an example of how weapons can spread across international borders and within state territory, and how they negatively impact upon democratising societies.

I. Arms availability in Southern Africa

The countries of Southern Africa have had to travel various and sometimes tortuous paths to self-determination. The region was used as a playing field by the Cold War powers in their battle for dominance. Proxy wars, fought between local combatants with international training, assistance and weaponry, have left a legacy of minefields, demobilised soldiers and debt. Countries in the region also purchased their own defence - Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa and Angola have all spent millions of dollars on conventional weapons. South Africa and Zimbabwe both developed indigenous weapons production facilities. Zimbabwe's production extends to light weapons and ammunition while South Africa's encompasses a spectrum of conventional weaponry (tanks, combat helicopters and missiles, in addition to light weapons and ammunition) and at one-stage was developing weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.[3]

While the wars in Angola and Mozambique were fought with both light weapons and major conventional weapons (tanks, aircraft and helicopters, for example), today it is

largely the more portable, maintainable small arms that remain in circulation. Efforts at demobilisation of ex-combatants in Zimbabwe (1979), Mozambique (1995) and Angola (1996) have been incomplete at best. There are reports of soldiers showing up in rags carrying rusted weapons at demobilisation camps in Angola, and similarly of weapons disappearing from padlocked warehouses in Mozambique.[4] These remnants of war, combined with an increasing trend in civilian possession of guns (notably in South Africa) have created a situation in the sub-region with the potential to destabilise weak countries and negatively affect security and development in others.

One factor contributing to the current proliferation of weapons in the sub-region is the militarisation of societies.[5] Decades of war in the sub-region has contributed to an increasing desensitisation to violence and the use of weapons in perpetrating it. This militarisation of the region was largely the result of South Africa's war against perceived communist expansion which led to high levels of defence expenditure among countries in the region (especially Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa). There is a continuum between the need for transparency and controls over conventional weapons and the need for controls and regulation over light weapons. Although the latter are currently identified as the more immediate threat to security and stability in many countries in the sub-region, efforts to reduce military expenditure in the region and prevent the acquisition of potentially destabilising conventional weapons by countries in the region should also be sustained. A short review of the current situation in a few Southern African countries with regards to arms acquisitions, military expenditure and problems being faced with regards to light weapons illustrates the many domestic and regional consequences of weapons proliferation.

Botswana

Botswana has not felt the impact of weapons accumulation as directly as some of its neighbours. This may be, in part, due to the fact that violent conflict has not featured in its recent history, unlike in the case of neighboring states. Weapons trafficked through Botswana from Angola to South Africa but there is little evidence that many weapons remain in Botswana itself.

Botswana's military expenditure reached a peak in the early 1990s but has subsequently declined to an average of US$150 million in 1996-1997[6] The country maintains a defense force and regularly purchases conventional weapons on the international market. Botswana strictly regulates the civilian possession of firearms, allowing only the

possession of shotguns and rifles by civilians. However, an indication of the increase in illegal weapons in the country is the slow increase of armed crime.[7]

Mozambique

There is no accurate measure of the number of weapons circulating in Mozambique. The estimates of weapons imported during the civil war range from 0.5 million to six million. During the United Nations peacekeeping operation (ONUMOZ 1993-1995), nearly 190,000 weapons were collected. However few of these weapons were destroyed and evidence suggests that many weapons stored in warehouses intended for use by the Mozambican police and defense force were stolen and dispersed among the general population.[8]

Starting in 1995, a series of joint operations have been carried out by the Mozambican and South Africa police agencies with a mandate to find and destroy arms caches. Focusing largely on the southern half of the country due to easier access to cache sites and the area being of greater strategic importance to the South Africans, the five 'Operations Rachel' to date have destroyed more than 300 tons of weapons and 40 tons of ammunition.[9] These destruction initiatives and improved border controls between the two countries have restricted what was once an abundant source of AK-47 assault rifles moving into South Africa.[10]

Officially, Mozambique curtails the civilian possession of firearms and has no legal firearm dealers. However, weapons were freely distributed during the war to militia and civilians and a comprehensive system of retrieving them has not been put into place. Mozambique has seen an increase in firearm-related crime in the years since the civil war. From 1994 to 1996 (the most recent figures available), armed crime as a percentage of all reported crime has increased.[11] Even if crime comes down in Mozambique, which some sources are indicating,[12] it is important that the police work to ensure that the use of firearms in crime also falls.

Namibia

In Namibia, following the attainment of independence from South Africa in 1994, the United Nations initiated what has been recognised as a fairly successful process of demobilisation and reintegration, including the collection and storage of weapons. These weapons were subsequently transferred to the Namibian police and defense forces for their use.

Today, Namibia's main challenge in controlling arms flows is related to its position between Angola - with its potentially limitless supply of arms - and South Africa, which continues to soak up weapons. Along the Caprivi Strip in northern Namibia, arms smugglers use weapons from Angola in sales for small amounts of money or bartered goods. The activity along this border ebbs and swells with cycles of fighting in Angola itself. During lulls in the Angolan war, weapons trade on the border increases and then diminishes when fighting in Angola resumes.[13]

There are signs that increasingly the weapons which had simply been moving through the country are now staying behind, especially in more urban areas. While statistics are not available on the use of weapons in crime, discussions with Namibian police officials suggest that this is increasing. This rise in gun crime is attributed to the large numbers of illegal weapons in the country, poverty and the militarisation of society.[14]

Seychelles

The Seychelle islands in the Indian Ocean play a very different role in the proliferation of weapons. The private off-shore banking promoted by the islands is thought to facilitate arms trafficking.[15] Weapons bound for Zaire were seized in the Seychelles but investigators found no evidence of government collusion. However, the production of fraudulent end-use certificates is a problem in the islands.

Countries such as the Seychelles which encourage off-shore banking are increasingly being identified as weak points in preventing the illicit trafficking of weapons. The United Nations has urged countries to implement measures to prevent their territories being used for illicit arms trafficking and suggested that countries be encouraged to realise that the movement of weapons and armed men through their territories is *"inherently destructive to their own stability and legitimacy".*[16]

South Africa

South Africa is unique in the sub-region for the high number of civilian-owned firearms and the largest military in the region. Its military spending is greater than that of Botswana and Zimbabwe combined (the next two largest military spenders in the region) at an average of US$3 billion per year in 1995-1997.[17]

An estimated 4.1 million firearms are licensed to civilians in South Africa, with about the same quantity in the possession of the police and defense forces and estimates of illegal

weapons ranging from 800,000 to 4 million.[18] An average of 20,000 firearm license applications are received each month by the government. This high number of new license requests can be attributed to unequal licensing practices in the past, which restricted the possession of firearms by blacks.

One of the challenges for South Africa is the extremely high rate of lost and stolen firearms. According to the South African Minister for Safety and Security, an estimated 30,000 stolen licensed firearms enter the illegal market each year. Added to this are the approximately 8,500 weapons lost or stolen annually from the police and defense force. The government has recently stated that studies by its illegal firearms investigation units "indicate that most illegal guns, especially handguns, are lost by or stolen from private individuals or the state".[19] These weapons are increasingly being used in crime. For example, the South African Police Service reports that 42 per cent of murders and 77 per cent of robberies were committed with firearms in 1996.[20] While stolen weapons entering the illicit market from within the country apparently represent the main source of supply, South Africa is also affected by weapons trafficked from countries in the sub-region, as well as from countries farther afield, including the former Soviet states, China, European countries and the United States. South Africa is also a source country for weapons, both those sold in legal transactions to other countries and weapons smuggled out of South Africa into neighbouring countries, especially Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

South Africa is among a handful of countries which have recently changed or are in the process of changing their legislation to create better controls over civilian-owned firearms. In many ways, however, South Africa is faced with a unique set of challenges in reviewing existing firearms policy. These range from historical factors – a legacy of internal conflict, discriminatory policies for arms acquisition and large numbers of weapons freely distributed to chiefs and local leaders – to the current reality of high levels of crime and violence. With people now choosing to purchase weapons for self-defence, legislation needs to be comprehensively reviewed and the enforcement of regulations improved.

The government has made strides in identifying the extent of the problem and has made an apparent commitment to take concrete action to address these issues. For example, a National Conventional Arms Coordinating Committee (NCACC) has been established to oversee the sale of military weapons and the current process of drafting of new Firearms and Ammunition Control Bill, which will replace the existing thirty-year-old Act.

Tanzania

The Tanzanian government has recently decided to liberalise the sale of firearms to civilians in the country and has initiated a process of recruiting and licensing firearm dealers. The move has raised fears over increases in gun-perpetrated crime in the country as well as concern over the ability of the government to ensure compliance with the legislation.[21]

Tanzania, sitting on the edge of the Great Lakes region in Africa, has also been identified as a transit country in the trafficking of weapons to Rwanda and Burundi. These weapons are believed to come through Tanzanian ports from countries in Eastern Europe and the Far East. Refugees from the Great Lakes are also reputed to have brought weapons into Tanzania, resulting in increased incidents of firearm-related violence.[22]

Zambia

During liberation struggles in Southern Africa, Zambia was used as a staging area for liberation forces (including the African National Congress's armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK)*), and arms for these groups were cached in the country. The degree to which these weapons are still on Zambian soil is unknown. However, Zambia has remained a transit country for weapons movements, most recently facing allegations from the Angolan government of assisting UNITA to rearm in contravention of the UN arms embargo. The recent report by the United Nations recommends that states, such as Zambia, which border countries or armed groups under embargo should take steps to ensure respect for the sanctions under domestic law. It also suggests that United Nations monitors should be placed in five Zambian cities (in addition to areas in South Africa and Mozambique, among others) to monitor sanctions. These would be steps towards implementing accountability for Zambia, to ensure that arms trafficking does not occur with the collusion of government officials.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, disarmament at independence was a protracted affair. The concealment of weapons by former combatants was "*justified as a precaution, in the event of the independence process being sabotaged or manipulated by Rhodesian forces*".[23] In the post-independence period, weapons coming from Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana were frequently reported.[24] The country is experiencing an increase in armed crime, suggesting a correlation with increased weapons availability.

Zimbabwe has an indigenous arms manufacturing capacity (mainly for small arms and ammunition) and exports to African countries.   Military expenditure, however, decreased sharply after 1991 from nearly US$400 million to less than US$250 million in 1997.[25]   The costs of Zimbabwean participation in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo have not been calculated and may translate into increased defence expenditure for the country.

II. Regional dynamics of arms circulation

The impact of weapons on security and development does not only affect individual countries. The presence of excessive quantities of weapons under inadequate control can also have implications for neighbouring countries. The protracted war in Angola provides clear evidence of this phenomenon, as does the way in which almost the entire membership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been drawn into the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In Angola it is virtually impossible to estimate the number of weapons in circulation. It was reported that in 1992, 600,000-700,000 weapons were distributed to civilians by the government following the renewal of fierce fighting.[26] During the demobilisation component of the most recent United Nations peacekeeping operation (UNAVEM III) only 34,425 weapons were collected, many of which were old and unserviceable.[27] Furthermore, besides the arms stockpiled during the seventies and eighties, Angola continues to receive weapons imports on a regular basis. Countries which are reported to have sold weapons to the Angolan government include Russia, Brazil, North Korea, Bulgaria, Israel, Ukraine and the Czech Republic. It is estimated that the Angolan government has spent at least US$4 billion between 1993 and 1999 on weapons for its war against UNITA.[28] Although sanctions to cut off UNITA's supplies were introduced on 1 October 1997, Jonas Savimbi has been able to find alternative routes of supply.[29] This process of rearmament by both sides has had a direct effect on the decision to resume the war.

The movement of small arms in the region can be viewed from both intrastate and interstate perspectives.* Within countries in Southern Africa (and elsewhere), there are two main ways by which arms move from legal to illegal possession. One is through the corrupt practice of arms dealers, arms manufacturers, police or defense officials which

permit the sale of weapons in their control for political, criminal or profit motives. The other is the theft of weapons from state armouries or individuals. South Africa and Mozambique both offer examples of this trend. In Mozambique, 12 000 weapons were reported stolen in 1994 alone.[30] There are also reports of security agents being involved in criminal activities, in which case arms officially issued are used for illegal purposes. The phenomenon of "sobels" (soldiers by day, rebels by night) in parts of West Africa epitomises this trend.

The movement of weapons from legal to illegal status within a country is often exacerbated by several factors. These include increased crime, a lack of effective policing, the increase of armed private security companies, and the demobilisation and disarmament of ex-combatants without suitable programmes for reintegration. This has occasioned the increase of banditry and armed crime in Angola during lulls in fighting and has to some degree had a similar effect in Mozambique.

Between countries in Southern Africa there are few regional arms sales. South Africa reported exports to other African countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Rwanda (in 1997), to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms but none to SADC members. Sales of categories of weapons excluded by the UN Register – small arms and light weapons – are more difficult to determine but are also thought to be fairly limited. In contrast, cross border movement of illegal weapons is extensive. This arms trafficking is facilitated on the one hand by the existence of increasingly well organised transnational criminal organisations, and on the other hand by the existence of well established covert arms supply networks across the region.

Illicit arms trafficking thrives where there are weak regulatory systems within countries, asymmetries between countries in their regulation of arms traders, ineffective enforcement of legislation, a lack of control over arms dealers and inadequate controls at ports of entry. Often it is in conflict regions, where a void in national control exists, that illicit trafficking flourishes.

The history of conflict in the region, which included patterns of covert arms supply, extensive arms smuggling and the frequent use of neighbouring countries as staging and storage

[*]The intrastate movement of small arms characterises the way in which weapons move through legal sales, from legal to illegal possession or are circulated among illegal possessors domestically. Interstate movement refers to the movement of weapons between countries which may be either legal sales or illegal trafficking.

points has facilitated the use of these same routes for arms trafficking today. After independence in the early 60s, (Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi) and in the late 70s (Angola and Mozambique) these countries hosted the remaining liberation movements in the region, which further boosted the activities of these arms pipelines.

For example, the ANC's armed wing, MK, was involved in smuggling weapons into South Africa from neighbouring countries, escalating in the 1980s and continuing until the early 1990s. Weapons, purchased from Eastern European countries, were systematically smuggled into South Africa, including AK-47s, pistols, landmines and hand grenades[31] using both simple smuggling in cars and a sophisticated method of smuggling weapons in an overland vehicle – a safari company operated as a front company for MK. It is estimated that between 1987 and 1992 this method brought up to 30 tons of weapons and ammunition into South Africa with the assistance of neighbouring countries.[32]   According to testimony during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the weapons were loaded in Lusaka, Zambia and transported overland to South Africa where the tourist-laden vehicle easily passed through the border post. Delivery points in Cape Town and Johannesburg were used and the weapons collected by MK members inside South Africa. MK remained involved in the project until 1992, although it appears that the arms smuggling ceased in 1991.[33] During this time other means of smuggling were also utilised, and weapons were cached along borders with neighbouring Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique.

Illicit arms trafficking thrives where there are weak regulatory systems within countries, asymmetries between countries in their regulation of arms traders, ineffective enforcement of legislation, a lack of control over arms dealers and inadequate controls at ports of entry. Often it is in conflict regions, where a void in national control exists, that illicit trafficking flourishes.

More recently, covert arms networks involving secondary and tertiary dealers have been put in place to circumvent international sanctions, for example facilitating weapons transfers to UNITA and Liberia, both under arms embargoes.[34] These arms traffickers are increasingly commodities traffickers, who will work through the illicit market moving the materials that are most in

demand or provide the most profit (for example, gems, precious metals, ivory, hard woods and drugs). This form of commodity trade is lucrative and difficult to track. Another dynamic of the extra-legal trade network in Southern Africa is the use of long, unpatrolled land borders and family and tribal networks that span countries to facilitate smuggling of both arms and drugs.

However serious the circulation of weapons is in the region, the real problem with the increased availability of small arms in Southern Africa is the impact of the availability of weapons in the region on democracy, development and human rights. This crisis is depriving individuals of the right to security and preventing Commonwealth states from effectively guaranteeing the safety of their citizens.

III. Impact of weapons on development and human rights

The use of weapons in crime, violence, intimidation and repression can undermine confidence in the democratic process while affecting the perceptions foreign states have of a country, thus jeopardising development and investment. South African president Thabo Mbeki, in his first address to parliament, identified reducing crime as being pivotal to encouraging foreign investment in the country. In South Africa, where crime is mainly perpetrated with a gun, gaining control over these weapons is paramount.

In Southern Africa, the linkages between the destabilising accumulations of small arms and the breakdown of development, peace and security are manifesting themselves. For example, with the increase in crime and local instability, democratisation programmes (which include demobilisation, disarmament, and policing) are being jeopardised to the point where people feel the need to acquire weapons for self-defence. In turn, this has led some communities in Africa to change their traditional negotiated conflict resolution and conflict management mechanisms (which rely on peaceful negotiation) to arming for self-defence. In Swaziland, a country with a traditionally limited demand for guns in spite of having been a smuggling route for anti-apartheid supporters, rural dwellers are now illegally arming themselves for protection against armed bandits.[35]

In addition to an increase in lawlessness, crime and banditry, illegal weapons can also be pivotal in creating political instability. This instability, in turn, may spur governments to spend more on reactive measures, including the purchase of military equipment, rather

than focussing on social, economic and development needs. Occasionally, increased policing and security can also lead to repression and the abuse of human rights.

The longest term impact weapons have is on development. Landmines restrict peoples' access to water and arable land, while the threat of being caught up in fighting prompts people to leave their homes and move into other parts of the country or into neighbouring countries. When, or even if, these people return, they must often restart their lives from scratch and rebuild all that they have lost. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people have died directly as a result of the war or indirectly due to starvation and disease in Angola, while hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced.[36] The development of individuals is also hampered by continued government expenditure on the military. A recent report that extra money generated from rising oil prices in Angola would be used to increase social spending is seen by skeptics as unlikely, with the money more likely to be spent on weapons, training and food for the army.[37]

Conclusion

There is a close relationship between peace and security in Africa and the economic, social and political development of countries in the region. The proliferation of light weapons and illicit arms trafficking in Africa pose a major threat to these. Although weapons do not themselves cause the conflicts and criminal activities in which they are used, the wide availability, accumulation and proliferation of light weapons may escalate conflicts; undermine peace agreements; intensify violence and impact on crime; impede economic and social development; and hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance.

The presence of large quantities of weapons in Southern Africa is fuelled by different motives on both the supply and demand sides. The countries in which weapons originate (although they may not be the producers) include South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. The countries through which weapons primarily transit include Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Swaziland. Currently, end-user states are primarily Angola, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The problems associated with each group must be seen in their own light and control measures tailored differently for the needs of each country. For programmes that can

actually lead to the reduction in the demand for small arms, a different approach needs to be taken for each country which addresses the specific roots of and targets areas for social and economic development.

There is a role for countries which have undergone similar processes or which have gained experience in addressing some of the issues faced by the countries in Southern Africa to share the fruits of those efforts. However in large part, the only effective and sustainable solution to the prevalence of weapons within society will rely on solutions that have been generated within affected countries and regions and that are suited to the needs and resources available.

The Commonwealth must recognise the role weapons play in undermining the foundations of human rights, namely the institutional ability to provide for the safety and security of citizens, and thus for sustainable peace and development and work within its membership to find solutions.

The use of weapons in crime, violence, intimidation and repression can undermine confidence in the democratic process while affecting the perceptions foreign states have of a country, thus jeopardising development and investment. South African president Thabo Mbeki, in his first address to parliament, identified reducing crime as being pivotal to encouraging foreign investment in the country. In South Africa, where crime is mainly perpetrated with a gun, gaining control over these weapons is paramount.

Society Under Siege: Crime, Violence and Illegal Weapons,
Edited by V. Gamba, *Halfway House, South Africa (1997]*

Identifying groups at risk

In developing strategies to control the availability of weapons and to reduce the demand for weapons by building peace and guaranteeing civilian safety, an important element is understanding the groups who are most likely to use weapons or become the victims of armed violence. The next section of the chapter briefly reviews these groups and the impact weapons have had on them.

Demobilised soldiers

Traditionally accepted as one of the most violent elements of society, demobilised soldiers, who in some cases are little more than children, have only one skill and know only one livelihood: the gun. Ineffectual quartering and demobilisation during peace processes have often led entire platoons to defect, transferring their military structures to crime. Indeed, without employment alternatives, retraining, adequate compensation, and disarmament, the danger is that men and boys will hold on to their guns and use them for personal gain. In Angola, for example, the countryside between Luanda and Kuito[38] and the coastal strip tying Luanda to Benguela and Namibe has been terrorised by groups of armed and militarily structured ex-combatants. The evidence shows that it is insufficient simply to inform people that they are no longer in the service of an army.

The criminal activities of demobilised soldiers may lead to the emergence of zones beyond administrative control, where not even relief personnel will dare work. The clash between these armed groups and rural communities is perhaps the worst type of emerging conflict. It has led otherwise innocent villagers to arm themselves in self-defense and to acquire a culture of intolerance towards foreigners. This intolerance has been seen to encourage vigilantism at best, and the massacre of economic and political refugees at worst. Entire regions lacking effective civilian administration and controlled by private militias composed of ex-combatants can become key smuggling areas, where weapons, drugs and even endangered species move relatively freely, and where human rights become abstract and irrelevant ideals.

Refugees and displaced people

An element radically different from that of demobilised soldiers is that of refugee communities. When situations in the rural countryside become untenable, fleeing groups frequently first target urban areas as havens of security and opportunity. The flooding of cities with migrant communities, however, often leads to an increase in intolerance between locals and newcomers and an escalation in crime as jobs and resources become scarce.

When cities subsequently become inhospitable and dangerous, the next migratory wave will take refugee populations outside state borders. As the refugee moves from one bad situation to another, skills for survival develop that may rely on armed force and violence. For example, micro-enterprises may spring up, to supply locally made weapons, or more commonly, ammunition for weapons in the area. Entrepreneurial violence is another natural manner in which refugees, with access to arms, choose to ensure their survival in conflict or near-conflict conditions.

The introduction of guns into a refugee society can harden individual and communal attitudes towards self-protection. Individual refugees who dare to leave a camp and walk towards a new future will often leave any possessions they may have behind.[39] If they have wealth in the form of cattle, money or goods, these would inevitably be stolen on the journey. A weapon, in contrast, can be used for self-protection. In times of state failure and the loss of formal mechanisms for protection, a gun can also ensure economic survival through crime.

Rural communities

The effects of gun trading businesses have a direct impact on the rural communities of countries such as Swaziland. On the road between Boane and Siteki,[40] near the border of Mozambique, an area of traditionally peaceful rural communities which has long lived off cattle production has become destabilised by the prevalence of weapons. Small villages along the border had traditionally protected their business with communal support groups. A group of young men of the village would patrol the cattle enclosures at night and, if a thief was found, he was beaten up as a means of deterring theft. Since gun smuggling across border started, guns from Mozambique are traded for money or for cattle and other goods from Swaziland.[41] This type of smuggling has profoundly changed the community socioeconomic structures.

Today, sporadic theft has robbed most villagers of their possessions. A culture of fear has settled over the area; women stay close to home out of fear of being assaulted or raped. Increasingly, villagers save money to buy guns of their own since the police are able to do little in such sparsely populated rural areas. Thus the community has not only suffered a change in cultural patters as a direct result of increased availability of guns, it has also suffered a change of faith in the ability of their own security forces to protect them.

Urban populations

For urban populations, a similar process is transforming societies. With the increased availability of small arms in cities such as Maputo, Windhoek, Luanda, and Johannesburg, there has been an increase in the cities' violence and gangsterism. Easy access to guns by criminals has reduced the power of the state to control violence, has led to the desertion of income earners from the inner city to the suburbs, and has increased the levels of random violence. But the urban gun-related violence phenomenon itself points to the further erosion of societies at large.

The city of Luanda is a good example. By April 1997 a peace process seemed to have reached fruition in Angola, and yet the people remained armed. At the end of the previous peace process in 1992, both warring parties re-ignited hostilities. At the time, the government of Luanda decided to arm its population - most of whom were displaced from rural areas - and reportedly more than half a million small arms were distributed among the civilian population in Luanda. Subsequently, the government has been unsuccessful in recalling these weapons. In a recent round of collection, only 500 guns were recovered.[42] The reason people cannot be convinced to surrender weapons is a lack of trust in future security. This is a case where weapons and weapon possession not only serve to degenerate cultures, but to imperil their social future. The renewed war in Angola testifies to the volatility of a post-conflict state in which weapons have not been completely collected and destroyed.

[1] Christopher Clapham, "African Security Systems: Privatisation and the Scope for Mercenary Activity," *The Privatisaion of Security in Africa*, South African Institute of International Affairs (1999).

[2] Southern Africa is defined for this purpose as the fourteen members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Twelve SADC members belong to the Commonwealth, excluding only the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola.

[3] For a history of the South African defence industry, see P Batchelor and S Willett, Disarmament and Defence Industrial Adjustment in South Africa, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

[4] For details of the demobilisation processes in both countries, see United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Small Arms Management and Peacekeeping in Southern Africa, UNIDIR, Geneva, 1996.

[5] See J Cock, *A Sociological Account of Light Weapons Proliferation in Southern Africa* in J Singh (ed.), Light Weapons and International Security, Indian Pugwash Society and British American Security Information Council, Delhi, 1995.

[6] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database- Botswana,, <www.sipri.se>, accessed 16 July 1999

[7] K McKenzie, Domestic Gun Control Policy in Ten SADC Countries, draft research paper, p. 4.

[8] P Batchelor in United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Small Arms Management and Peacekeeping in Southern Africa,, pp. 87-88.

[9] For a detailed account of these operations, see M Chachiua, Operations Rachel: 1996-1999, ISS Monograph Series No 38, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, June 1999.

[10] S Zwane, *Time to spike the guns of violence*, The Star (South Africa), 20 May 1998.

[11] M. Chachiua, *The Status of Arms Flows in Mozambique*, in T. Nkwane, M Chachiua and S Meek, Status of Arms Flows in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, 1998, p. 34.

[12] See K McKenzie, op cit, p. 15.

[13] See for example, E Laurance (ed.), Arms Watching: Integrating Small Arms and Light Weapons into the Early Warning of Conflict, International Alert, London, forthcoming 1999.

[14] K McKenzie, op cit, p. 7.

[15] S Meek (ed), Controlling Small Arms Proliferation and Reversing Cultures of Violence in Africa and the Indian Ocean, Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, 1996, p. 23.

[16] United Nations Security Council, Final Report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda), United Nations, New York, 1999 S/1998/1096, p. 21.

[17] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database- Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, <www.sipri.se>, accessed 16 July 1999.

[18] Efforts to quantify the number of illegal weapons in the

country are virtually impossible. These figures represent the range used by various government officials and non-governmental organisations to describe the extent of the problem.

[19] South African Press Association, *Most Illegal Guns Have a Legal Origin*, 12 July 1999.

[20] South African Police Service Centre Information Management Centre, Incidence of Serious Crime, 24 November 1997.

[21] *Tanzanian Outcry over Arms Trade*, Mail and Guardian (South Africa), ,www.africanews.org>,

[22] For a greater explanation, see Human Rights Watch Arms Project, Stoking the Fires: Military Assistance and Arms Trafficking in Burundi, HRW, Washington, DC, 1997, pp.68-72.

[23] T. Nkiwane, *Small Arms Flows in Zimbabwe*, T. Nkiwane, M. Chachiua & S. Meek, Weapons Flows in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland, ISS Monograph, N 35, January 1999, p 6

[24] Nkiwane reported a decrease in reported unlawful possession of weapons since 1992. See T Nkiwane Ibid, table 2, p. 8

[25] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database- Zimbabwe, <www.sipri.se>, accessed 16 July 1999

[26] J Potgieter, *"The price of war and peace: A critical assessment of the Disarmament Component of the United Nations Operations in Southern Africa"* in V Gamba (ed.), Society under siege: Crime, violence and illegal weapons, Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, 1997, p. 153.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *"The gun-running sequel in Africa"*, Zambia Times, 21 August 1999 as distributed by Africa News Online

[29] R.Cornwell & J. Potgieter, **"***Private militias and arms proliferation in Southern Africa*", Paper presented at International Conference on Southern African Security, Centro de Estudos Estrategicos e Internacionais, Maputo, 19-20 November 1998, p. 7

[30] G. Oosthuysen, Small Arms Proliferation and Control in Southern Africa, SAIIA, Southern African Series, Braamfontein, 1996, P 51

[31] R Williams as quoted in J Cock, ibid, p. 102.

[32] S Brummer, "MK's Secreat Weapon: A Bundu Bashing Safari Tour", Electronic Mail and Guardian, 19 June 1997 www.mg.co.za/mg/news/97june1/19june-mk.html.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Frelimo co-operation with ZANU was contrasted with CIO role in molding the Mozambican rebel movement RENAMO; ANC and Frelimo close relationships' antithesis was the role of the SADF arms supply to RENAMO; South African direct and indirect (through arms supply to UNITA) intervention in Angola was part of its fight against both SWAPO and ANC whose cadres were accommodated by the MPLA government and so on so forth;

[35] See S Meek, in M Chachiua, T Nkiwane and S Meek, op

cit.

[36] P Batchelor, *Intra-state conflict, political violence and small arms proliferation in Africa*" in V Gamba, op cit., p. 111.

[37] "*Angola seen buying arms on higher oil revenue*", <u>Reuters</u>, 30 July 1999.

[38] Information resulting from field trips undertaken by the Towards Collaborative Peace Project personnel at ISS, South Africa.

[39] Observations and interviews conducted by the TCP project at ISS in the field (Maputo Province, Mozambique and Mpumalanga, South Africa).

[40] TCP project field trip to Swaziland, 1996.

[41] Idem.

[42] Interviews held in Luanda by the TCP project field researcher, 1997.
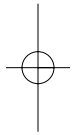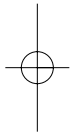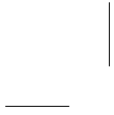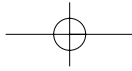
Courtesy visit, RAF Coltishall,UK — Photo: Carlos Guarita (Panos)