THE SMALL ARMS WORKING GROUP

The Small Arms Working Group (SAWG) is an alliance of U.S.-based non-governmental groups working together to promote change in U.S. and international policies on small arms. SAWG members believe that small arms proliferation must be countered by more responsible policies on legal sales and international cooperation to reduce illicit trafficking. Participation in SAWG is open to any organizations that support its objectives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
• British American Security Information Council (202) 785-1266 www.basicint.org
• Center for Defense Information (202) 332-0600 www.cdi.org
• Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (202) 530-0340 www.gunfree.org
• Federation of American Scientists (202) 675-1018 www.fas.org/asmp
• Human Rights Watch (202) 371-6592 www.hrw.org

INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK ON SMALL ARMS

In May 1999, non-governmental organizations from around the world launched the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) to coordinate national, regional, and international campaigns against small arms proliferation and misuse. Participating groups represent a wide range of interests, including arms control, development, domestic gun control, humanitarian aid, human rights, public health, and religious concerns.

For more information see: http://www.iansa.org.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Civilians: Increasing proportions of the victims of today’s wars are civilians. Women, children, and the elderly are caught in the crossfire of combatants who often use weapons indiscriminately.

Political dissidents and human rights activists: Small arms are the principal tool of intimidation used by repressive police and military forces.

Foreign relief and development workers: Aid workers in conflict areas are increasingly being threatened, kidnapped, or killed with small arms, leading some organizations to reluctantly abandon essential relief operations.

International peacekeeping troops: The United Nations found that small arms pose the principal threat to international troops seeking to establish or maintain peace.

Tourists and the tourism industry: Armed violence has a devastating impact on local tourism, the leading source of revenue for many countries.

Local and foreign businesspeople: Small arms are often used to kidnap or extort wealthy businesspeople. The spread of weapons undermines economic growth and can have a devastating impact on developing economies.

Children: The light weight and small size of small arms have made it possible for children to use these weapons and be recruited as combatants.

WHAT ARE SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS?

Small arms and light weapons are weapons that can be carried and used by one or two people, including handguns, assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank or anti-aircraft guns, and light mortars. Ammunition, grenades, landmines, and explosives are also part of this category.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS?

Small arms cause the vast majority of deaths and injuries in international and internal conflicts worldwide, killing hundreds of thousands of people each year and traumatizing many more. Cheap, light, and simple to operate, small arms are the principle tools of paramilitaries and insurgents and the weapons of choice for state-sponsored repression.

Small arms are also responsible for the deaths and injuries of civilians outside of war zones. Each year, tens of thousands are victims of terrorists, drug traffickers, and other criminals. Thousands more are hurt or die yearly in accidents or suicides with small arms.
“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.”

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the UN Security Council, September 24, 1998

Who Supplies Small Arms?
Over 70 countries legally produce and sell small arms and their ammunition. In addition to new sales, post-Cold War surplus stocks are often given away or sold cheaply by the U.S. and other states. Much of the world small arms trade now consists of illicit trafficking as arms from past conflicts are sold to insurgents, drug traffickers, and criminals on the black market.

What the U.S. Government Should Do

Reduce the Legal Supply
The U.S. Congress should adopt an Arms Transfers Code of Conduct to prevent small arms sales to dictators, human rights abusers, governments involved in conflicts or those who are not transparent about their arms stocks. The U.S. government should also halt sales to unstable regions and verify that exported small arms are used by the intended recipients for the agreed purposes.

Reduce the Illicit Trade
The U.S. Senate should ratify and the administration should implement the Organization of American States Convention on Illicit Firearms Trafficking, and the U.S. should promote rapid conclusion of a similar global agreement under United Nations auspices. The U.S. government should also help ensure that UN embargoes are properly and fully enforced and should promote adoption of international rules governing arms brokers.

Shed More Light on the Problem
Currently, Congress is notified of proposed arms exports worth $14 million or more, but most small arms sales fall below this threshold. Congress should have the opportunity to review particular sales and sales trends on small arms, regardless of dollar value. The U.S. government should also encourage international transparency on small arms sales, including regional registers of small arms transfers.

Restrict Small Arms Sales in the U.S.
The U.S. Congress should tighten federal laws on the sale of small arms, especially the types and quantities of arms available to citizens, in order to lower the number of firearms-related homicides, suicides, and accidents. Such measures will also curtail the activities of organized criminals and drug traffickers, who take advantage of lax U.S. laws to buy and sell weapons to criminals at home and abroad.

Ban Particularly Inhumane Small Arms
The U.S. government should sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention banning the production, stockpiling and sale of landmines. It should also halt research and production of high-tech weapons that are designed to kill with shrapnel as well as bullets—such as the Objective Individual Combat Weapon—or to cause excessive injury, such as acoustic and laser weapons.

Help Destroy Excess Arms
The U.S. government should destroy surplus small arms stocks rather than transfer them abroad. It should support efforts by NATO and Partnership for Peace members to do likewise. The U.S. government should also provide technical and financial assistance to help disarmament efforts in post-conflict societies.

Get Involved
Speak out against violence in the media and educate others about the dangers of owning guns.

What You Can Do

Press for Change
Urge the administration to restrict small arms exports and urge Congress to pass a Code of Conduct to promote a more responsible arms export policy.

Call on Your Senator in Support of Rapid Ratification of the OAS Convention against illicit small arms manufacture and trafficking.

Write to Your Local Legislator or Member of Congress in Support of Tighter Laws on Small Arms Sales.

Join the Small Arms Working Group and the International Action Network on Small Arms. Combine your strengths with others to combat the abuse and proliferation of small arms.

In El Salvador, the number of violent deaths actually increased by over 30% after the civil war due to the large quantity of firearms in circulation.

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In 1998, the U.S.
State Department licensed over $475 million worth of small arms and ammunition for export.

In Uganda, an AK-47 rifle can be bought for the price of a chicken...

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF

“Controls on illicit weapons in a crime context will not be enough. After all, most illegal weapons were first traded legally.

A large part of the problem is the easy availability, whether through legal or illicit means, of cheap weapons.”

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