



# Small Arms Collection, Destruction, and Stockpile Protection

**Small arms collection, destruction, and stockpile protection programs are important because:**

- **Collection programs prevent weapons from being used in crimes, banditry, and violence**
- **Destruction programs increase security and serve as confidence building measures**
- **Stockpile security prevents weapons from being stolen or misused**

One reason why small arms are such common tools of violence for armed groups or individuals is their longevity – in other words, guns last a long time. Small arms remain lethal for many years after manufacture and, even if sold legally, can be used for unintended purposes or misused long after the original intention of the sale has passed. When weapons remain in post-conflict societies, the damage they cause can even outweigh the suffering they produced during the conflict. In El Salvador, more people were shot dead in 10 years of peace than during the previous 12 years of war. Strategies to curb the proliferation and misuse of small arms cannot simply regulate the production and ownership of new weapons; but must also get rid of the guns already in circulation.

Weapons collection and destruction programs play an important role in the disarmament process, both in post-conflict situations and for crime prevention in societies where criminal violence is high. These programs are vital because they remove weapons from circulation and prevent their misuse in the affected area. Such efforts also raise political awareness of the small arms problem and can serve as confidence-building measures. Weapon destruction has a symbolic aspect as well – large bonfires of guns have been used in ceremonies to mark the end of conflicts in Cambodia, Kosovo and Serbia; and sculptors from Mozambique have transformed guns into striking works of art. The largest number of small arms ever destroyed in one day was 100,000 in Rio de Janeiro in 2001.

In addition to the formal disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants, voluntary disarmament may complement official efforts to reduce the large quantities of weapons that are often left in the hands of civilians after conflicts. Often, incentives are offered in return for weapons. For example, in the Republic of Congo, ex-combatants were offered reintegration assistance, such as vocational training and employment, in exchange for handing in weapons. In Central America, weapons were exchanged for food and consumer goods. Another option is to offer collective benefits for community development, such as improved roads and irrigation.

Once weapons are collected, it is essential either to destroy them or to stockpile them securely. Mismanaged stockpiles can be ransacked by private traffickers, militias or terrorists and can then make their way into conflict-prone areas. Poor stockpile security resulted in the looting of 650,000 firearms from Albanian military depots in 1997. Destroying surplus, obsolete or confiscated weapons is the only way to ensure that they will not be illegally retransferred or misused in the future.

*\* Small arms 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. Light weapons, ammunition, grenades, landmines, and explosives are also part of this category.*