

Small Arms and Weapons Collection Programs

Small arms collection programs reduce the negative consequences of small arms proliferation and misuse because they:

- Reduce the supply of weapons
- Prevent weapons from being used in crimes, banditry, and social violence
- Prevent weapons from fueling new conflicts in neighboring areas

Small arms remain lethal for many years after their manufacture. When weapons remain in post-conflict societies, the damage they cause can rival the suffering caused by the armed conflict itself.

Police and other security forces often coercively collect weapons from criminals and illegal holders of weapons. When one side is defeated in an armed conflict, they may also be forced to surrender weapons in their possession. In contrast, a voluntary weapons collection program is one in which a responsible government, NGO, or international government organization motivates individuals or groups to surrender weapons that are not required for purposes of national defense or internal security and which may be unsafe for or unwanted by citizens. Incentives offered as part of these programs can include amnesty from prosecution for violations of weapons laws, monetary or in-kind rewards, or collective community development assistance.

Voluntary weapons collection programs are used both in post-conflict environments as well as in societies experiencing high levels of armed crime and social violence. Coercive and voluntary weapons collection programs are

commonly utilized internationally, and are now an integral part of the development of many post-conflict reconstruction programs. For example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) adopted a “Best Practice Guide on Small Arms and Light Weapons in Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration Processes.”

Collection programs are carried out at both the local and national levels, and sometimes yield large quantities of weapons. For example, in 2004 and 2005, 459,855 small arms were collected in Brazil in exchange for cash vouchers. According to the Brazilian health ministry there were 3,234 (or 8 percent) fewer homicides in 2004 than in the prior year—the first reduction in recent history. In Afghanistan, the United Nations’ Afghanistan New Beginnings Program, had, as of January 3, 2006, collected 37,571 small arms and nearly 3 million rounds of ammunition.