

Small Arms and Domestic Laws

Domestic laws on gun purchases affect the illicit trade in small arms because:

- **Unlike drugs, small arms are durable goods that can be sold and resold in the international market many times**
- **Most small arms start out in the legal market and find their way into the illicit market**
- **Stocks of weapons in government warehouses can be stolen or diverted for use in crimes, homicides, and suicides**

In the United States, which has notably weaker firearm laws than other industrialized nations, virtually any adult who is not a convicted felon can legally purchase and possess a handgun. Lax gun laws help explain why the overall rate of firearm deaths is at least 8 times higher in the United States than that of its economic counterparts in the international community.

Weak domestic firearms laws in the United States not only affect individuals living in that country, but also adversely affect neighboring countries to the north and south. For example, the leading source of black market weapons in Mexico is the United States. The continuous flow of guns across the border means that despite Mexico's own strict gun control policy, gun violence remains pervasive. Tight laws on gun sales in Canada are also circumvented

by arms smugglers along the 4,000 mile border with the U.S.

Minimum standards for domestic regulation of arms purchases would help ensure that small arms are sold for legitimate purposes and not misused or diverted from legal to illegal markets. Resolution 1997/28 of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice called for such standards. The suggestions included licensing of firearm owners and registration of firearms so that individuals are held accountable for the proper use and safekeeping of weapons they purchase. Responsible storage practices by individuals and governments were also highlighted by the Commission. These provisions would help to control the international illicit trade in small arms since arms trafficked within a country's borders can easily move onto the international black market.