

Small Arms and Peacekeeping

Small arms interfere with peacekeeping missions because:

- **Small arms increase the possibility of outbreak of conflicts in areas of crisis**
- **Small arms endanger the safety of both international peacekeepers and the local population**
- **Small arms hinder conflict resolution**

Small arms impact all stages of a peacekeeping operation, from its inception to its implementation and conclusion. Even after peace accords are signed and peacekeeping missions approved, continuing small arms violence often makes it impossible for such operations to begin or for peacekeepers to do their job. Often as militaries withdraw, armed elements (including police forces, opposition groups and criminal organizations) take their place, and the fighting continues. For example, deployment of the UN peacekeeping operation in Congo was considerably delayed due to continued fighting on the ground.

Not only are peacekeeping missions at risk from small arms use, but so are the soldiers and civilian officials there to implement them. The United Nations has determined that small arms and light weapons pose the principal threat to troops seeking to establish or maintain peace among combatants. Peacekeeping troops and local UN employees have recently been targeted, and occasionally killed, in Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Bosnia. Heavily armed rebels in Sierra Leone—purchasing weapons in exchange for diamonds mined from the

fields they control—have made a mockery of UN peacekeepers, taking hundreds of them captive for several weeks at a time. The discovery of large caches of small arms and explosives by NATO peacekeeping troops in Kosovo might have prevented even more violence in this troubled area.

The use of small arms to undermine peacekeeping operations can delay the conclusion of a peacekeeping mission indefinitely and even lead to its failure. In Angola, three UN operations in a row failed in large part because of rebels' easy access to weapons. Some UN peacekeeping operations are mandated to address the presence and proliferation of small arms with tasks such as the comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and reintegration of armed groups; close monitoring of the supply of war-related materiel to the field for peacekeepers; targeting organized crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism; and providing public security crisis management. Thus, in former war zones awash in weapons, resources needed for post-conflict peace-building must instead be used to combat the myriad problems that accompany small arms saturation.