

Small Arms and Humanitarian Relief

Small arms hinder humanitarian relief efforts because:

- **Aid workers are specifically targeted by small arms-wielding groups and individuals**
- **Small arms limit access to populations in need of assistance**
- **Small arms divert resources from humanitarian relief to security expenditures**

The widespread availability of small arms has increased the duration, incidence, and lethality of armed conflict, causing an increased need for humanitarian relief efforts to aid populations devastated by war. The proliferation and misuse of small arms has also made the delivery of this assistance all the more difficult. Civilians and aid workers are now regarded as legitimate targets for extortion, threat, theft, rape, and brutality by armed actors. Red Cross, United Nations, and other aid agency workers are increasingly threatened and murdered in the course of their work, principally with guns and grenades.

Small arms-fueled conflict often causes massive population migration, with approximately 12.8 million refugees and 23 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) still away from their homes as of 2000. Even when a conflict has ended, refugees and IDPs are often afraid to leave camps and return home because of the substantial amounts of weapons that remain in circulation. Small arms also militarize refugee and IDP camps, subjecting refugees and IDPs to threats and intimidation, including rape, injury, forced

prostitution, slavery, as well as forced recruitment into armed service.

Small arms limit the access of aid workers to affected populations. Although International Humanitarian Law requires that aid agencies have access to populations that need humanitarian assistance, approximately 50 percent of populations in conflict regions live in areas that are not accessible to relief campaigns due to security threats. Small arms-fueled conflict and violence often cause aid operations to be delayed, suspended, or canceled. Relief supplies are also often stolen by armed combatants for their own use or to sell to help finance further fighting.

The dangers posed by small arms to aid workers and to the security of humanitarian aid provisions forces aid agencies to divert resources away from relief supplies into budgets for security services. In some countries it has become too expensive, both in the cost of human lives and cash, for outsiders to provide much needed aid, and populations are forced to endure the horrors of war alone.