

# Small Arms and Tourism

## **Small arms can reduce the benefits of tourism in developing states because:**

- **Fear of conflict or crime-related gun violence keeps tourists from traveling to certain destinations**
- **Tourist sites are sometimes damaged or rendered inaccessible by ongoing hostilities**
- **Foreign tourists are sometimes expressly targeted in attacks**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and a leading source of revenue for many developing countries. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is among the top five “exports” for 83% of countries and the top export for almost 40%. Tourism has one of the highest rates of job creation, both directly within the industry and in related areas. Tourism also helps bring in foreign currency, providing a more consistent source of income than exports like coffee or other primary goods. Yet the dangers associated with the proliferation of small arms may drive tourists away, often from the countries most dependent on it as a source of revenue. Violence in several African states, for example, reduced tourism by 1/3 to 1/2 in the late 1990’s.

The outbreak of conflict or insurgent activity will drive even the most adventurous traveler away from traditional tourist havens. Southern Mexico, Indonesia, and the Philippines are among the many locations that have seen a dip in tourism due to localized hostilities. The impact of rebel groups’ activities may directly impact tourist sites, such as in Kenya, where bandit

groups use animal reserves as their base of operations. High levels of gun violence associated with crime also keep tourists from visiting previous vacation destinations. For example, Guatemala and El Salvador have only recently seen tourism rise significantly even though their internal conflicts ended years ago. Recent political instability and related violence has led to mass cancellations of trips to places like Israel and Zimbabwe. In all of these cases, small arms are the most commonly used weapons.

In several recent cases, armed groups have targeted tourists in order to disrupt an industry that provides much needed income to the governments that they oppose. When 62 people were gunned down by members of the Islamic Group in Luxor, Egypt in November 1997, the militant group responsible achieved some of its goals: the attack brought on a sharp decline in tourism in Egypt, leading to a decline in GDP growth for the country in 1998. In another example, Muslim separatists in the Philippines have kidnapped tourists to make demands on both Manila and the tourists’ home states.