

*Armed Violence, Weapons Availability and Human Security: A View of the State of Play and Options for Action*

Cate Buchanan, Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy, July 2004.

The problem of small arms today calls for renewed perspectives on security, for traditional research and policy options on arms availability (which usually concentrate on border control policy and stockpiling statistical surveys) fall short of addressing the real problem at hand, which is that “armed violence consumes the lives of thousands of people every week”.

“Human security provides the state and weapon centric disciplines of arms control and disarmament a multidisciplinary framework with which to better understand the challenge of weapons availability and misuse”, while it bridges the gap between security and development frameworks. Human security has much to offer in the study of the critical issue of small arms and weapons availability, indeed:

- “It puts a human face on the often technical discussions of arms control”
- “It provides multidisciplinary ‘lenses’ and fresh insights for an issue that has been crafted mainly by disarmament and law enforcement experts”.

Human security can also put the focus on the *demand side* of the small arms issue, underlining for instance that it is the lack of personal security and community security which leads to increased demand for small arms. On the other hand, “creating the conditions of law and order, and access to justice [helps] reduce feelings of insecurity and the demand for weapons”. Human security also helps to stress that in DDR programs (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) the most important element is perhaps in fact “the ‘R’”, which however is oftentimes “the most poorly understood”.

There has been however some progress in recent years, with the adoption in 2001 of the UN Programme for Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA). This programme is not binding, but “nevertheless represents the only ‘global’ tool for addressing the small arms crisis”. Yet it only covers the “illicit” trade of small arms, while unfortunately and “put simply, a legal weapon can be as misused as an illegal weapon”. Pioneering efforts in the tackling of the legal trade were led by IANSA, the International Action Network on Small Arms, which is a grouping of over 500 NGOs. These efforts gathered important momentum, and prompted a number of states such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Holland, France, Norway or Finland to put forward their own initiatives in view of an arms trade treaty, or stronger and more comprehensive arms trade regulations.