

Reducing the Stock of the Illicit Trade: Promoting Best Practice in Weapons Collection Programmes

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Executive Summary

It is now widely recognised that, to be successful, efforts towards preventing and combating the illicit trade in SALW will require a multifaceted approach which simultaneously tackles the demand for and the supply of these weapons. In this regard, developing and promoting international norms, standards and mechanisms for the effective removal of illicit weapons from circulation is a major challenge for the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

There are two distinct scenarios within which weapons collection initiatives operate: the peace-time scenario, where efforts are focused on reducing criminal violence; and the post-conflict scenario, where efforts are focused on the objective of conflict prevention through peace-building.

Scenario 1: Crime prevention

Experience of removing weapons from societies in the context of crime prevention is most extensive in the Americas. In an effort to address the exceptionally high rate of firearm homicide in Brazil, in 1999, a community development organisation, Viva Rio, has had considerable success mobilising the population of its hometown and state and developing a good working relationship with the authorities there. This has led to the collection and public destruction of some weapons. Such weapons collection initiatives are often most effective not in terms of the physical numbers of weapons collected, but rather through the success of complementary efforts to raise the political stakes around the issues of gun control.

Scenario 2: Conflict prevention & peace-building

Immediate disarmament post conflict:

In many situations, when armed conflict ends through surrender or settlement, it is essential to disband militias, disarm their fighters, and redirect the latter towards peaceful and constructive activities. In demobilisation centres set up for this purpose, ex-combatants surrender the weapons they bring with them and are given clothing, food, money, official papers, training, and/or other assistance. Collected weapons are often destroyed publicly, sometimes immediately and on site. In those countries, such as Sierra Leone where destruction has not taken place, this can pose significant risks.

Voluntary weapons collection post-conflict:

In countries where the peace process has been formally wound up it is much more difficult to retrieve the tools of war. Holders of weapons will be reluctant to disarm if they are disappointed with the benefits of peace or sceptical as to how long it will last. The critical variable in this is probably the extent to which weapons holders believe they need to retain their weapons, raising the importance of measures to address the demand for SALW. Under the joint South Africa-Mozambique Operations Rachel destruction programme informers are given rewards, often cash, whose value is determined on the basis of such criteria as the value of the revealed cache.

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Whilst the particular set of circumstances surrounding different weapons collection programmes are likely to be, to some extent, unique, it is nevertheless possible to identify elements or preconditions that are essential for any weapons collection programme to succeed.

Tackling root causes:

The most important precondition for a successful weapons collection programme is to tackle the root causes driving demand for SALW, inter alia through ensuring respect for human rights. The success of all weapons collection initiatives will thus depend, to some extent, on the main targets of the practical disarmament efforts having faith in assurances of security that are provided by the state.

Existence of a stable peace:

The existence of a relatively stable peace will be crucial if former combatants are to be persuaded to give up their weapons. Moreover, the compliance of former combatants is essential, based as it is on a willingness to disarm and some degree of faith in the political settlement on offer.

Supporting measures:

Under conditions of relative peace, the two main success criteria are the support of the wider public for measures to reduce the level of SALW in society, together with measures to control access to SALW on the part of civilians.

Sanctions vs incentives:

Also important is the need to balance the levying of sanctions and provision of incentives in the construction of practical disarmament initiatives. Three criteria are important in this regard: their effectiveness in accomplishing the immediate objective of disarmament, their contribution to long-term programme goals, such as public safety and/or political stability, and their cost.

Finance:

The issue of finance must also be addressed. It is clear that some modest level of financial resources is necessary if people who hand in firearms are to be compensated. In post-conflict environments, sufficient resources need to be made available inter alia for the construction and staffing of the weapons collection sites and for the provision of cash or material incentives to former combatants in exchange for the surrender of weapons.

The importance of destruction

The destruction of collected SALW should be considered an essential element of any practical disarmament programme. Whilst destruction may not be strictly necessary in terms of the collection of weapons per se in order for such initiatives to be self-sustaining, they must result in the permanent removal of weapons from society.

Executive Summary

The UN Conference and the Programme of Action

The draft Programme of Action, L4 rev.1, makes few direct references to the need for weapons collection initiatives in their own right; an unequivocal statement of support for practical disarmament initiatives in all their aspects is lacking. Accordingly, Section I (the Preamble) of the ultimate Conference Programme of Action should:

- Explicitly recognise the role of weapons collection initiatives in the context of both promoting post-conflict peace-building and in tackling violent crime; and
- Establish clear commitments to promote and support the collection of SALW, in post conflict regions and other areas where excessive or uncontrolled availability of SALW is a major problem.

Section III – Implementation, international cooperation and assistance and Section IV – Follow-Up should contain specific practical and financial provisions for supporting weapons collection initiatives, for example, through:

- Establishment of a process for information exchange on experience regarding weapons collection and for the promotion of best practice.
 - Establishment of systems to facilitate better co-ordination and mobilisation of assistance for weapons collection (including clearer guidelines as to the types of initiatives that can be supported by different international agencies, such as the UNDP, and regional arrangements, such as the EU).
 - Establishment of new sources of funding for particular aspects of weapons collection (such as the small arms destruction fund that has been canvassed by the UK government).
 - Establishment of a mechanism for speedy provision of practical assistance and expertise in order to carry out weapons collection and destruction, for example through the establishment of a team of experts.
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Introduction

Illicit² small arms and light weapons (SALW³) can originate from many different sources. Some are manufactured and traded illicitly from the beginning, however, most illicit weapons leak from poorly managed government stockpiles, or are diverted from other legal end-users. However, even if all sources of “new” illicit weapons were blocked with immediate effect, the millions of SALW already in circulation that are outside state control are enough to ensure that the illicit trade would continue for a long time, perhaps into the 22nd century. The permanent removal of illicit weapons from society is therefore essential if effective progress is to be made towards preventing and combating the illicit trade in and use of SALW.

It is now widely recognised that, to be successful, efforts towards preventing and combating the illicit trade in SALW will require a multifaceted approach which simultaneously tackles the demand for and the supply of these weapons. In this regard, developing and promoting international norms, standards and mechanisms for the effective removal of illicit weapons from circulation is a major challenge for the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Opinions differ on how best to tackle the many aspects of the illicit trade in SALW, but there is wide agreement on the need and feasibility of co-ordinated international support for the removal of illicit weapons from societies suffering from their proliferation.

This briefing examines the issue of weapons collection⁴ from a practical point of view, setting out some of the conditions that assist such efforts, and providing examples of different types of initiatives that have taken place. By pointing to possible examples of best practice that can inform future efforts in this area, the briefing makes recommendations as to how the weapons collection issue can be addressed within the context of the UN Conference, the Programme of Action and resultant follow-up measures.

Conditions for a Successful Weapons Collection Programme

Overview

One of the primary aims of any weapons collection initiative is to create or reinforce a government monopoly of the tools of violence. However, it is essential that such a monopoly be balanced by the rule of law and respect for human rights and civil liberties. Indeed, such “practical disarmament” is only one component of public security. When attempted in isolation from other efforts to build security, it will typically fail. Unless the motives that drive people to want firearms/SALW are convincingly addressed, they will be reluctant to give these up. Attempts to forcibly disarm a population will typically heighten their desire for private firepower. Accordingly, weapons collection efforts can only work in the context of a dual effort to improve the capacity of the state to enforce the law, on the one hand, and to create effective safeguards against the abuse of state power, on the other.

Broadly speaking there are two distinct scenarios within which weapons collection initiatives operate: the peace-time scenario, where weapons collection efforts are focused on reducing criminal violence; and the post-conflict scenario where efforts are focused on the objective of conflict prevention through peace-building.

However, in some cases the distinction between political and criminal violence is blurred (e.g. in Afghanistan, Colombia, Northern Ireland and Sierra Leone) and communal violence has been sustained through various forms of criminal enterprise. At the same time, violent conflict of an ostensibly political nature can support illicit economic activity (e.g. in Albania, Angola, Colombia and Sierra Leone). By the same token, many of the mechanisms underpinning practical disarmament are similar, whether the aim is to fight crime or build peace.

Despite the blurring of the line between politically and criminally motivated illicit weapons possession and use, the objectives and methodology underpinning weapons collection initiatives and the outcomes of individual initiatives will vary depending on the prevailing circumstances, as shown below.

Scenario 1: Crime prevention

Experience of removing weapons from societies in the context of crime prevention is most extensive in the Americas. Gun buy-backs⁵ are quite common in the United States. They are typically organized and funded privately, often with the support of local civic groups and media and with the assistance of local police and federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). Although some initiatives have resulted in the voluntary surrender of several thousand firearms, the liberal gun-control laws in the US mean that such efforts, in themselves can have little impact on the huge numbers of weapons circulating. The principal benefits accruing from such weapons collection efforts in the US thus relate more to the way in which they help focus public attention on the problem of the proliferation and misuse of firearms and involve local communities in working to address these phenomena.

Indeed, despite a series of emotive and highly-publicised incidents of gun violence in the US, including the 1999 school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, significant new restrictions in US gun control law have yet to materialise. This is in contrast to the experience of the United Kingdom following the killing of 16 primary school children in Dunblane, Scotland, in March 1996, and Australia following the killing of 35 people at Port Arthur, Tasmania, in April 1996, prompted the governments of both countries to move quickly to remove firearms from society (in Britain some 185,000 arms were surrendered, while Australians turned in nearly 644,000 weapons) and introduce tough new restrictions on their possession. The combination of widespread public revulsion at the killings and consequent support for the tougher gun-control legislation was instrumental in the success of the practical disarmament initiatives in these countries.

Conditions for a Successful Weapons Collection Programme

Scenario 1: Crime prevention

Where weapons collection efforts are perceived to have enjoyed a measure of success, they have sometimes led to the establishment of similar programmes elsewhere. For example, the Goods for Guns programme established by Fernando Mateo in New York served as a model for the programme of the same name established in the Central American city of San Salvador. Run by a coalition of citizens, businesses, NGOs, and churches called the Patriotic Movement against Crime (abbreviated MPCD in Spanish), the programme has successfully drawn the attention of politicians and communities alike to the need to reverse the proliferation and misuse of firearms in the country. Unfortunately, as in the case of most US buy-back programmes, it seems to have had little impact on the stock and flow of legal and illegal weaponry in El Salvador. Similarly, in an effort to address the exceptionally high rate of firearm homicide in Brazil, in 1999, a community development organisation, Viva Rio, collected 1.3 million signatures in support of an initiative to ban the sale of guns in Brazil. The organisation has had considerable success mobilising the population of its hometown and state and developing a good working relationship with the authorities there. This has led to the collection and public destruction of some weapons. In collaboration with local authorities and others, Viva Rio has also set up a comprehensive database which tracks registered guns which are legally sold as well as those seized by the police. Viva Rio's signature campaign and other lobbying efforts have placed gun control squarely on the national legislative agenda with its emphasis on the establishment of a strong base for gun control among citizens and local authorities. The inference from the success of Viva Rio's efforts is that weapons collection initiatives are often most effective, not in terms of the physical numbers of weapons collected, but rather through the success of complementary efforts to raise the political stakes around the issues of gun control.

Scenario 2: Conflict prevention & peace-building

Immediate disarmament post conflict

In situations where weapons possession and use has been primarily politically motivated, the first step towards disarmament of the factions can only be made when violence, including the misuse of SALW, has been halted to a significant extent. The first step in the Northern Ireland peace process involved ending the misuse of firearms – specifically, their use in sectarian violence. This was achieved when the Republican and Loyalist militias announced and maintained their cease-fires. While this did not put an end to all armed violence in the province, its level was then low enough to allow movement to the next, more difficult stage of the peace process.

With the guns more-or-less silent, the perceived need or demand for weapons had to be reduced. Fundamentally, this could only be achieved by addressing the root causes of the conflict. The Good Friday agreement of April 1998 represented an attempt to do this. Despite this progress, however, since April 1998, progress on the 'decommissioning' of weapons, as it is called in Northern Ireland, has been extremely difficult.

It seems clear that successful peace-building in the case of domestic political conflict, as in Northern Ireland, must tackle all aspects of the weapons problem: use, demand, possession, and supply. Some of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Central America have diverged from this pattern only in the sense that use, demand and possession were tackled almost simultaneously, within the framework of a UN peacekeeping mission.

Conditions for a Successful Weapons Collection Programme

Scenario 2: Conflict prevention & peace-building

The peace processes in African countries such as Liberia, Mali, and the Central African Republic have involved a weapons collection component, with some degree of success. For example, the Government of the Central African Republic, with the assistance of an African peacekeeping force (Mission interafricaine de surveillance des accords de Bangui, MISAB), conducted a weapons collection and confiscation programme in 1997 for the purpose of recovering arms and ammunition looted from government stores in April-May 1996. Of the more than 2,000 small arms, 100 artillery pieces, and several hundred thousand rounds of ammunition taken, 95 percent of the heavy weaponry and 62 percent of the small arms and light weapons were retrieved.

In many such situations, when armed conflict ends through surrender or settlement, it is essential to disband irregular militias, disarm their fighters, and redirect the latter towards peaceful and constructive activities. Often, such disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) measures will also be needed for regular security forces. DDR considerably reduces the risk of renewed civil war as well as the possibility that former soldiers and guerrilla fighters will turn to armed banditry. In demobilisation centres set up for this purpose, ex-combatants surrender the weapons they bring with them and are given clothing, food, money, official papers, training, and/or other assistance in order to prepare them for a new life in the regular security forces or civil society. Collected weapons are often destroyed publicly, sometimes immediately and on site.

In those circumstances where destruction does not take place, this can pose significant risks. For example, from November 1999 to May 2000 an attempt at disarming rebel factions was made by the Government of Sierra Leone with the assistance of ECOMOG and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). According to the UN, 12,695 weapons and 253,535 rounds of ammunition were retrieved before the collection programme collapsed, with the peace process itself, in early May 2000. Collected weapons were not immediately destroyed, but simply disabled, thus facilitating their subsequent recapture by rebels after the peace process had broken down.

Voluntary weapons collection post-conflict

The sequence followed in Northern Ireland or in countries where DDR programmes have been undertaken, may not be appropriate in places like Cambodia and El Salvador where excesses of weapons in society are linked to conflicts which have long-ended. In such countries where the peace process has been formally wound up – the peacekeeping force has left and ex-combatants are demobilised – it is much more difficult to retrieve the tools of war. Holders of weapons will be reluctant to disarm if they are disappointed with the benefits of peace or sceptical as to how long it will last. Disarmament can no longer be effected by 'command'. The critical variable in this is probably the extent to which weapons holders believe they need to retain their weapons, raising the importance of measures to address the demand for SALW.

For example, since 1995, the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) have undertaken a series of joint weapons destruction operations, code named 'Rachel'. Arising out of a March 1995 bilateral agreement on co-operation and mutual assistance in combating crime, the Operation Rachel programme was launched for the purpose of destroying arms caches left in Mozambique following that country's civil war and transition to democratic rule. These weapons were generally believed to be finding new markets among criminals in South Africa and contributing to that country's surge in rates of violent crime during its own, post-apartheid transition period.

Conditions for a Successful Weapons Collection Programme

Scenario 2: Conflict prevention & peace-building

The weapons caches are located on the basis of information supplied by local informers and then destroyed on site by South African and Mozambican police specialists. Informers are given rewards, often cash, whose value is determined by the team negotiating with the informers on the basis of such criteria as the value of the revealed cache. Incentives such as clothes, biscuits and sweets have been introduced as Mozambican women and children have become more important sources of information on weapons caches. This non-punitive approach is designed to encourage people to reveal weapons caches and to generate support for the programme among local communities and the Mozambican people generally.⁷

In Cambodia, however, the weapons collection and confiscation programme was backed by a sub-decree limiting legal gun ownership to a thin stratum of upper-level government and military officials. Although, as of October 2000, 66,309 small arms had been recovered, and 36,505 destroyed, the Cambodian weapons collection process has not been without its problems. The failure to destroy all collected weapons and to close off new supplies of SALW has meant that military-style weapons are still accessible to those who seek them. Yet, a more fundamental limitation of the government collection programme is the present inability of the Cambodian security forces (police, gendarmerie, and army) to ensure internal security and uphold the rule of law. Accordingly, whilst most people are broadly supportive of the process, many have been and remain reluctant to participate in it themselves so long as the state does not ensure security for all people and communities.⁸

Finally, it is important to recognise that weapons collection and destruction programmes can, in some cases, have a modest impact on the demand for SALW. Initiatives such as the Mali “Flamme de la Paix”⁹ and the “Tools for Arms Project” in Mozambique¹⁰ have created very different, yet visible, symbols of disarmament which can enter the public psyche, thereby helping to generate the much-needed public support for practical disarmament initiatives.

From this discussion, it is clear that ‘disarmament by command’ operates within a particular set of parameters, with the objective of facilitating the transition of a society from war to the creation of a sustainable peace. At the same time, it is also possible to identify a number of similarities between the objectives and circumstances surrounding voluntary weapons collection programmes that occur some time after a conflict has ended, and those weapons collection programmes that are conducted in a peacetime, crime prevention context. Both rely on the co-operation of individual firearm holders. Both offer positive incentives and sometimes the prospect of punishment for non-compliance after an amnesty period. And both have the same fundamental aim – to remove from society weapons that can threaten political stability and/or public safety.

Building International Action – Towards Best Practice for Weapons Collection

The experiences of practical disarmament or micro-disarmament initiatives, particularly over the past decade, constitute an extensive body of information relating to the conception, conduct and outcomes of weapons collection programmes. Whilst the particular set of circumstances surrounding different initiatives are likely to be, to some extent, unique, it is nevertheless possible to identify elements or preconditions that are essential for any weapons collection programme to succeed.

Tackling root causes

As referred to above, the most important precondition for a successful weapons collection programme is to tackle the root causes driving demand for SALW, inter alia through ensuring respect for human rights. The experience of countries such as Cambodia has shown that, in order for such programmes to significantly reduce the number of weapons in circulation, the demand for SALW needs to be addressed. This will require the authorities to take steps to assure the safety of civilians and former combatants alike. In circumstances where government agents (be they police, military or paramilitary forces) are committing violations of human rights, or where government is failing to prevent the commission of violence by non-state groups, civilians and former combatants will be reluctant to surrender their weapons. The success of all weapons collection initiatives will thus depend, to some extent, on the main targets of the practical disarmament efforts having faith in assurances of security that are provided by the state.

Existence of a stable peace

Related to this, in the context of post-conflict disarmament, the existence of a relatively stable peace will be crucial if former combatants are to be persuaded to give up their weapons – a requirement which has sadly been lacking in Sierra Leone and other places. Moreover, whilst ‘disarmament by command’ has been used to describe disarmament in the context of demobilisation, the compliance of former combatants is essential, based as it is on a willingness to disarm and some degree of faith in the political settlement on offer.

Supporting measures

In terms of weapons collection under conditions of relative peace, the two main success criteria are the support of the wider public for measures to reduce the level of SALW in society, together with measures to control access to SALW on the part of civilians. Accordingly, the most successful weapons collection initiatives in the context of crime prevention are those whereby, as in the UK and Australia, public revulsion, following the commission of crime through the use of SALW, led to the tightening of domestic gun control regulations and the simultaneous removal of particular categories of SALW from society. In circumstances where weapons collection efforts have either lacked widespread public support, or – as in the US – have failed to be accompanied by increased controls on the supply of SALW, little progress has been achieved in the longer term. Other supporting measures such as effective stockpile management and enhanced legal and operational measures to block potential new supplies of illicit weapons will also be important if the progress made in removing weapons from society is to be sustained.

Building International Action – Towards Best Practice for Weapons Collection

Sanctions vs incentives

Also important is the need to balance the levying of sanctions and provision of incentives in the construction of practical disarmament initiatives. Three criteria are important in this regard: their effectiveness in accomplishing the immediate objective of disarmament; their contribution to long-term programme goals, such as public safety and/or political stability; and their cost. Trade-offs between these criteria are unavoidable. For instance, offering attractive rewards to firearms holders will usually boost the number of weapons collected, but is costly. Undesired side effects may also result. Gun imports and thefts may increase as people without weapons try to get their share of the rewards being offered. Nevertheless, incentives are essential to voluntary disarmament. Clearly, what works best in the way of inducements will depend on local conditions. One approach, which may work well under certain kinds of conditions, is to combine weapons collection with development projects. It rewards and encourages the afflicted community, rather than individuals surrendering weapons. Penalties for non-compliance are a separate issue. If practical disarmament is part of a wider government effort to reinforce state control over small arms, then citizens who fail to surrender such weapons during the relevant amnesty period must be told, in advance, they will face legal prosecution.

Finance

The issue of finance must also be addressed. It is clear that some modest level of financial resources will need to be available. For example the weapons collection exercise carried out in Australia in 1997 saw AUD 320 million (USD 210 million) paid to those handing in weapons, whilst the hand-gun surrender programmes in the UK in 1997 and 1998 saw the UK government paying out just under GBP 90.2 million (USD 146 million) in compensation for returned firearms. Furthermore, in order to maximise the success of weapons collection programmes in post-conflict environments, sufficient resources need to be made available inter alia for the construction and staffing of the weapons collection sites and for the provision of cash or material incentives to former combatants in exchange for the surrender of weapons.

The importance of destruction

Finally, the destruction of collected SALW should be considered an essential element of any practical disarmament programme. Whilst destruction may not be strictly necessary in terms of the collection of weapons per se in order for such initiatives to be self-sustaining, they must result in the permanent removal of weapons from society. Any collection initiative which does not result in the destruction of surrendered weapons leaves the risk that some will re-enter society. Accordingly, reducing the levels of illicit weapons in society will necessitate making provision for their speedy and effective destruction.

Weapons Collection and the UN Conference Programme of Action.

From the following discussion, it is clear that, in order to fulfil its principal objective of reducing weapons stocks, practical disarmament must be supported by measures designed to strictly control weapons supplies and reduce the demand for them. Furthermore, since successful practical disarmament will tend to reinforce the state's monopoly of force it must be accompanied by safeguards against the abuse of this monopoly. In the specific context of post-conflict peace-building, practice to date points to the need to link disarmament measures to broader peace-building efforts, including development. In sum, practical disarmament can only be effective where it is part of a broader, integrated strategy that addresses all major components of peace and security in a given society.

In this regard, the UN Conference and ensuing Programme of Action have a critical role to play in creating the conditions which can ultimately lead to the successful removal of illicit SALW from society. Whilst the need to remove illicit/unauthorised weapons from circulation may be a relatively uncontroversial issue the main debating points are likely to centre on: the definition of the term "illicit"¹¹ with respect to SALW; the necessity of destroying all collected or seized SALW; and how the issue of weapons collection/practical disarmament should be addressed.

The draft Programme of Action, L4 rev.1, in fact makes few direct references to the need for weapons collection initiatives in their own right. Rather, the practical disarmament issue is embedded in references to the management and destruction of surplus or unmarked SALW and the importance of DDR programmes, which are summarised as follows:

The UN Conference and the Programme of Action

II. Preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects

National measures

16. expeditious destruction of any collected or seized unmarked or inadequately marked SALW
15. destruction of all confiscated, seized or collected SALW unless another form of disposition has been officially authorised
18. destruction of surplus small arms and light weapons using internationally accepted and effective procedures
19. awareness-raising and confidence-building through public destruction events
21. develop and implement disarmament demobilization and reintegration programmes

At the global level

33. the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs to develop a reference manual on ecologically safe methods of destroying SALW
 34. to support disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants and the collection and destruction of surplus and illegally held SALW
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Weapons Collection and the UN Conference Programme of Action.

Building on commitments in the Programme of Action

III. Implementation, international cooperation and assistance

- 14. to provide assistance in destruction of surplus SALW
- 16. to support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

Building on the commitments in L4 rev.1

The above commitments represent a good basis on which initiatives to remove illicit and surplus weapons from circulation can be built. However, an unequivocal statement of support for practical disarmament initiatives in all their aspects is lacking. Accordingly Section I (the Preamble) of the ultimate Conference Programme of Action should:

- Explicitly recognise the role of weapons collection initiatives in the context of both promoting post-conflict peace-building and in tackling violent crime.

Beyond this, Section II of the Programme of Action should:

- Establish clear commitments to promote and support the collection of SALW in post conflict regions and other areas where excessive or uncontrolled availability of SALW is a major problem.

However, in the context of practical disarmament, the most important sections of the UN Conference Programme of Action are Section III – Implementation, international cooperation and assistance and Section IV – Follow-Up. Since operationalising the commitments within the Programme of Action will pose significant challenges for all states, these sections should contain specific practical and financial provisions for supporting weapons collection initiatives. For example, through:

- Establishment of a process for information exchange on experience regarding weapons collection and for the promotion of best practice.
 - Establishment of systems to facilitate better co-ordination and mobilisation of assistance for weapons collection (including clearer guidelines as to the types of initiatives that can be supported by different international agencies, such as the UNDP, and regional arrangements, such as the EU).
 - Establishment of new sources of funding for particular aspects of weapons collection (such as the small arms destruction fund that has been canvassed by the UK government).
 - Establishment of a mechanism for speedy provision of practical assistance and expertise in order to carry out weapons collection and destruction, for example through the establishment of a team of experts.
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Conclusion

The removal of unauthorised weapons from society is an essential part of preventing and combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. The successful design and execution of practical disarmament initiatives is, nevertheless, a complex and multifaceted task requiring action to tackle both the supply of and demand for illicit weapons. Accordingly, the UN Conference Programme of Action should seek to establish a process whereby elements of best-practice for weapons collection initiatives can be identified and operationalised. It should also establish programmes that provide for coordinated assistance and the provision of technical expertise and support for practical disarmament measures. The Programme of Action should provide for coherent national, regional and international action on the range of supporting measures – such as responsible regulation of civilian possession of SALW, a tight grip on sales and traffic, and effective control over government stocks of SALW. These are necessary to ensure that weapons that are surrendered or confiscated do not re-enter society and/or are not replaced by new supplies of SALW. Finally, but most importantly, the Programme of Action must ultimately recognise and address those factors that drive demand for SALW in all its aspects.

Endnotes

- 1 This paper draws from an occasional paper *Removing Small Arms from Society: A Review of Weapons Collection and Destruction Programmes* published by the Small Arms Survey in July 2001 and written by Sami Faltas (BICC), Glenn McDonald (Small Arms Survey), and Camilla Waszink (Small Arms Survey/BICC). For further information on weapons collection initiatives visit BICC's *Help Desk for Practical Disarmament* (www.disarmament.de). Also see *Managing the Remnants of War: Micro-disarmament as an Element of Peace-building*, Sami Faltas and Joseph Di Chiaro (eds), Baden-Baden (Germany), NOMOS, 2001, ISBN 3-7890-7341-5.
 - 2 For the purposes of this paper the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is defined according to the UN Disarmament Commission Guidelines for international arms transfers in the context of General Assembly Resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No.42 (A/51/42) 1996. Furthermore, also for the purposes of this paper, illicit weapons will be defined as those that are used "contrary to the laws of states and international law".
 - 3 The abbreviation SALW is used from hereon to refer to all categories of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.
 - 4 The terms "weapons collection programme" and "practical disarmament programme" are used interchangeably throughout this briefing.
 - 5 In the US, the term 'gun' typically refers to small arms in general and 'buy-back' to any kind of voluntary collection programme.
 - 6 Berman, E. *Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lomé Peace Agreement*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper No. 1, December 2000.
 - 7 Chachua, M. *The Evolution of Operations Rachel, 1996-1999*; and Hennop, E. *Illegal Firearms in Circulation in South Africa in Governing Arms: the Southern African Experience*, Gamba, V. ed. Institute for Security Studies, 2000.
 - 8 Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Cambodia (WGWR) *Public Opinion Survey on the Weapons Confiscation Program of the Royal Government of Cambodia*, November 1999; *WGWR Annual Report, February 1999-February 2000*; and *WGWR Correspondence with various officials, July-December 2000*.
 - 9 Between October 1995 and January 1996, Malian ex-combatants turned in some 3,000 weapons as part of a post-conflict demobilization process in that country. These were subsequently burned in a public ceremony called the 'Flame of Peace'.
 - 10 In October 1995 the Christian Council of Mozambique launched a weapons collection programme dubbed the 'Tools for Arms Project'. Supported by both Mozambican government and opposition, it offers a wide range of tools and machinery in exchange for weapons. The collected weapons are destroyed and fragments of many of the weapons used to produce works of art, ornaments or practical objects.
 - 11 For a discussion of the definition of "illicit" SALW, see Biting the Bullet briefing 6, *Controlling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons: Enhancing controls on legal transfers*, E. Clegg & M. Crowley, February 2001; and briefing 7, *Controlling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons: Strengthening domestic regulations*, W. Cukier, February 2001.
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