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**A SECURITY PROBLEM IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION AND
THE HORN OF AFRICA: PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND
LIGHT WEAPONS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

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One of the greatest challenges to the governments of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa is the control of proliferation and use of illicit small arms and light weapons. Considering the number of deaths caused by these weapons compared to those caused by other conventional types, such weapons could be renamed "weapons of mass destruction".

The devastating negative effects of illicit arms and light weapons on peace, security and stability in the society need to be addressed. There are national, regional and international initiatives currently in place to address the menace including the United Nations sponsored world conference on control of proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons held in New York in July 2001. This paper will define small arms and light weapons, address the origin, causes and effects of proliferation, trafficking and use of illicit small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. It will also suggest possible short and long term strategic approaches to solve the problem.

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A SECURITY PROBLEM IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION AND THE HORN OF AFRICA: PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

For quite some time, global leaders have focused on the control of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Yet we have heard very little about the on-going death and devastation wreaked by widespread use of small arms and light weapons in conflicts around the globe. In July 2001, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette informed the United Nations Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons that:

there are an estimated 500 million small arms and Light Weapons in circulation—one for every 12 people on earth. A significant number of these end up in the hands of irregular forces, criminals and terrorists. Even in societies not torn by conflicts, proliferation of small arms has contributed to a culture of violence and crime. Small arms cause big losses. As weapons of choice in 46 out of 49 major conflicts since 1990, they contribute to roughly 4 million deaths — about 90 percent of them are civilians, and 80 percent are women and children. Small arms could well be described as weapons of mass destruction¹.

In these matters, the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa are no different. They have their share of the number of illicit arms circulating in the world as well as the related

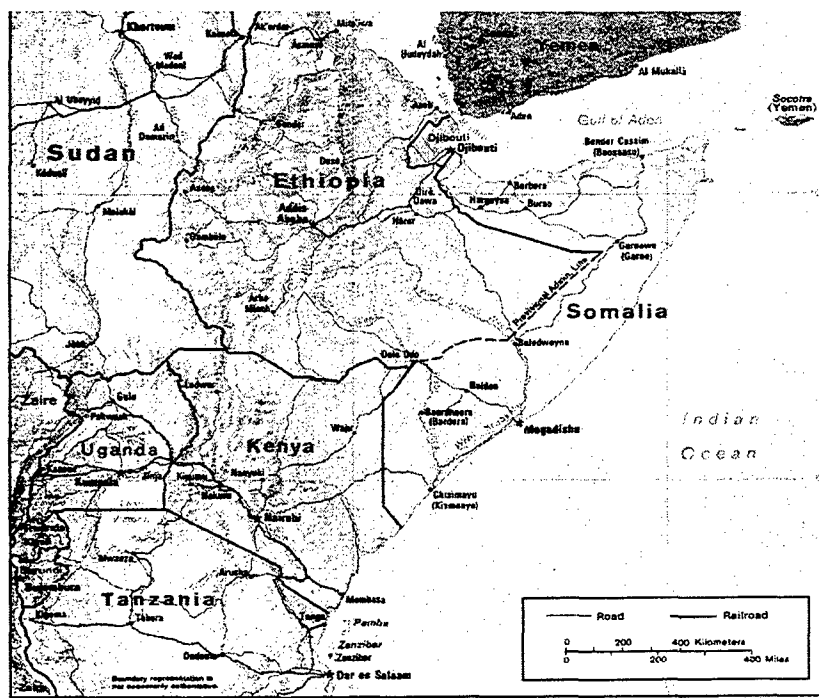


FIGURE 1 MAP OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION AND THE
HORN OF AFRICA

negative consequences that follow. In the same United Nations Conference on illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, the attendees were further informed that:

the uncontrolled spread and easy availability of small arms and light weapons currently kill more than 500,000 people each year in wars, civil strife and crime. It undermines respect for international humanitarian law and disrupts social, political and economic development. It causes the displacement of millions of innocent people and benefits terrorists as well as the perpetrators of organized crime and makes peace keeping that more difficult².

This grim description perfectly fits the Great Lakes region of Africa where large quantities of illicit small arms and light weapons are being moved unchecked across porous regional borders. Governments lack sufficient security means and the funds to staff, check, and control movements of this lethal, destabilizing contraband. Even if this were possible, unscrupulous arms dealers and the large numbers of cattle rustlers would find other means of passing illicit arms through these extended porous borders.

It may seem easy to blame illicit arms for the related ills that have devastated the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa for decades. Indeed, there may be some genuine legitimate need for these arms. Even so, we must address the issue of proliferation and circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons. Otherwise, the problem will haunt the region for a long time to come. These reasons are contributing to inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Intra-state conflicts usually result from rebellion against central authority, inter-communal ethnic or religious conflicts, sporadic short-lived conflicts related to resources such as livestock, and generalized violence, which is banditry-related. The inter-state conflicts are caused mainly by border disputes and resources related issues, especially cross-border cattle rustling. These factors are often caused by poor governance, lack of respect for human rights, poverty and corruption in high places.

These difficult political and economic problems are exacerbated by the presence of illicit small arms and, light weapons to the extent that they have become a destabilizing factor to political and socio-economic development in the region. Control over or reduction of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons has thus become a priority item on the agenda of the security committees of the member states of both the East African Community (EAC) and the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

Peace, security and stability are prerequisites to sustainable growth and development of any nation or region. Without them, little will be achieved. Proliferation and use of illicit small arms and light weapons have become a destabilizing factor to the promotion and attainment of lasting peace, security and stability. National and regional initiatives, supported by international

and non-governmental organizations are currently being undertaken to address the problem caused by the proliferation, circulation and use of illicit small arms and light weapons.

This study defines small arms and light weapons. It describes their introduction into the region, discusses the causes and effects of the proliferation, including illegal trafficking. It argues that this proliferation is inhibiting the political and socio-economic development of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

DEFINITION

What are small arms and light weapons? A report of a group of governmental experts presented to the UN defines small arms and light weapons as follows:

Small arms are those weapons designed for personal use, and light weapons are those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew. The category of small arms includes revolvers and self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub machine-guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons include heavy machine-guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile system and mortars of calibers less than 100mm³.

Anti-personnel mines are likewise included in the definition. However, this study does not consider mines, which are being addressed as a separate issue in non-proliferation initiatives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL ARMS

Small arms and light weapons possess special characteristics, which make them versatile and lethally effective. These weapons are fairly easy to manufacture, requiring little technology and complicated machinery. Once out of the production line and in the hands of the users, such weapons are lightweight and small making them easy to carry and conceal.

Small arms and light weapons are not expensive, individuals and criminals can readily afford them. Maintenance of these weapons does not require elaborate training or complex logistic support, yet these have a lethal effect when used in local conflicts. Small arms and light weapons are easily available in black markets and easy to acquire by subversive armed groups, liberation movements and criminal groups. While heavy weapons tend to become obsolete within a short time, small arms last longer and this permits their easy circulation from one conflict to another.

PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS

The Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa are flooded with illicit small arms and light weapons, significantly more so than during the Cold War. The US Department of State Bureau

of Intelligence and Research reports that, "Many nations and manufacturers eager to empty warehouses and arsenals of arms made superfluous by post-Cold War political and technological advancements have seen Africa as an attractive market. The consequent widespread availability of cheap weapons, easy to use and maintain (AK-47s sell for as little as \$6 in some African countries), fuels destruction throughout the continent"⁴. This clearly describes the situation in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

The continuing internal problems in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia create some of the many markets for those involved in the proliferation of illicit small arms. In fact, the region is so saturated with such weapons that it makes the words of a famous Philippines leader come true, "acquiring them is as easy as buying fish in the market"⁵. The Bureau of Intelligence and Research further states that, "The proliferation of illegal firearms in Kenya has reached crisis proportions. ---black marketers sell some 11,000 guns annually, most of which enter Kenya from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. According to Kenya's Chief Licensing Firearms Officer, 'seventy-five percent of the country is awash with illicit arms'"⁶. This clearly demonstrates that the situation is getting out of hand and that concerted national, regional and international efforts are needed to urgently address the phenomenon before more damage is done.

REASONS BEHIND THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS

Proliferation of small arms in Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa certainly is a reality. But do people simply wake up one morning and arm themselves? An answer to this question is not easy. But we know that groups of peoples, communities and even criminal groups arm themselves for certain reasons. When they become sufficiently frustrated, they eventually resort to violence.

Common issues cited for resorting to taking up arms are problems related to boundary disputes, religious differences, selective modernization of one group and not others, the state's unequal share of resources whereby some areas receive larger share of national resources than others. Unfair application of state authority, such as arming one tribe and not the other and misapplication of opportunities in employment and other developmental resources are good breeding grounds for disgruntlement, anger and confrontation. This in turn produces conflict, and the perceived need for arms to advance a cause. The cause could be criminal, desire for revenge, seeking to be heard, independence and redress of an injustice.

SOURCES

EXTERNAL SOURCES

We have already noted that the world is awash with illicit small arms. Further, arms that reach the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, are simply a spillover from global proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These arms also arrive in the region legally and diplomatically, from formal international arms transfer. Such government-to-government transfers are routinely approved exports. They are sometimes delivered to government-approved transfers for their so-called contribution to national interests but ironically, they end up in covert destinations and black markets.

Small arms are also obtained from within states through thefts or from sub-national groups. Sometimes they come from deserters or demobilized soldiers. For example, even in the United States of America, "the General Accounting Office report found out in 1993 that small arms parts (including parts for the M-16 military rifles) are being systematically stolen from Pentagon's repair shops and warehouses, and then sold to gun dealers"⁷. If this can happen in the US, how much more theft is going on in other countries? Kenya has recently reported cases of police officers being shot by armed thugs and their guns taken away. Such abducted weapons often end up being used by criminals committing violent robberies in the streets of Nairobi or in other major towns or even in rural areas. So legally imported arms fall into the wrong hands.

CONFLICTS

Collapsed or failing states and regimes contribute to the proliferation and availability of illicit arms. "In Somalia, following the collapse of Said Barre's regime and the disintegration of the Somali army at the peak of the civil war in early 1992, some 500,000 weapons ended up in the hands of the competing Warlords"⁸.

Similarly, following the collapse of Iddi Amin's regime in Uganda in 1982, entire military armories in Northern Uganda were vandalized and weapons including Anti-Aircraft and Anti-tank weapons ended up in the hands of Karamojong tribesmen. The same weapons are currently in use in cattle rustling activities along the common border with Kenya and Uganda with devastating effects on the communities living along the border.

ILLICIT TRANSFER

The illicit transfer of weapons from one conflict area to another contributes to proliferation and to the use of small arms and light weapons. The failure to effectively mop-up illegal arms at

the end of the Rwanda genocide in 1994 resulted in the same weapons being transferred and used in the continuing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. Some of these weapons ended up in the neighboring countries of Tanzania and Uganda causing insecurity in the affected areas of the spillover.

From time to time governments supply weapons to the threatened populace for self-defense, as is the case in the arming of home guards by Kenyan and Ugandan authorities. The same applies to the creation of people's militia in Ethiopia during Mengistu's regime. Such arms are subsequently illegally used against other tribes. States may complain that arms are smuggled into conflict areas by rogue suppliers, drug traffickers, nationalist groups, criminals, and cattle rustlers. But states are themselves by far the biggest source of small arms in conflict areas.

THE COLD WAR

At the height of the Cold War, large quantities of weapons were proliferated across the planet. Given the plethora of legal and illegal trading networks for small arms, once the weapons are produced there is virtually no telling who will eventually acquire them. Some Cold War arms are still circulating in the region, passed on from the Ethiopia-Somali and Ethiopia-Eritrea conflicts, and the Shifita guerrilla war fought in Northeastern Kenya in the early 1960s.

Another source of small arms is the flourishing trade in second hand arms from the Cold War stockpiles, left-over weapons from civil and nationalist wars have entered the black market and resurface in hot spot areas fueling conflicts.

LOCAL PRODUCTION

Local products, even home-made guns, though crude in nature, are another source of illicit arms. In parts of East Africa, guns are fabricated at home and effectively used to terrorize communities in cattle rustling areas. For example, home-made pipe bombs have recently been used effectively to demolish houses in parts of Kenya, facilitating armed robberies.

These weapons end up in the hands of the opposition groups in the states, criminal organizations, private security organizations, vigilante groups, and individual citizens leading to what Michael Renner has concluded that "we are witnessing an era in which, in a sense, armies are disarming while civilians are rearming"⁹.

Whereas military arms can be managed effectively, those in possession of civilians are hard to track. It is difficult to control their use. It is known that in some regions, criminals rent guns for overnight use. Such cases are reported to be rampant and flourishing in Kenya, particularly in the city of Nairobi. Intelligence sources report that at the height of the Somali war,

former Said Barre's soldiers crossed unnoticed into Kenya with arms, taking advantage of a porous border which is difficult to monitor. Such weapons are known to be hired out and used overnight to commit robberies and cause terror. They are then returned to the owner for a fee. Thus a single weapon is used to commit several robberies and murders.

EFFECTS.

The possession and use of illicit small arms and light weapons have devastatingly impaired peace, stability and socio-economic development of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. This region is probably emblematic of the devastation that these weapons have caused in other regions of the world, where proliferation of such arms is likewise rampant. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has made conflicts become more destructive, leading to greater loss of life and property.

Such conflicts can easily expand from small ethnic rivalries within states to interstate conflicts. Then they lead to displacement of people, disruption of normal life, and risk of military intervention. In short, they blow the situation way out of proportion. These conflicts interfere with peace and stability. They cause poverty and economic hardships. They disrupt educational and other vital social services. In the case of the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, proliferation and use of these weapons have contributed to the rise in violence within communities, leading to numerous loss of life. Killing has become easy, almost a way of daily business. Traditional respect for life and property has sadly eroded.

Lawlessness and crime in urban and rural areas is increasing. There is evidence of the development of organized crime such as car-jacking, drug trafficking, armed robberies, burglaries and other crimes that thrive from the availability of small arms. Hardly a night goes by without reports of car jacking and armed robberies resulting in fatalities especially in the city of Nairobi and to some extent Kampala and Dar es Salaam. Law enforcement authorities are often outgunned by gun-totting hooligans.

In the Northwest parts of Kenya and Northeastern Uganda, cattle rustlers now raze entire villages with small-arms fire, causing extensive damage to life and property. This is a new, very disturbing phenomenon. The presence of illegal small arms has transformed formerly low-key skirmishes by pastoral tribes into major and serious conflicts, pitting whole tribes against one another.

In long-standing conflict areas along the borders of Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya, guns have been responsible for turning the traditional communal activities of pastoral societies into deadly confrontation. Rustlers among Uganda's Karamojong, now carrying modern arms instead of traditional weapons, have succeeded in amassing the cattle of their neighbors,...cases of low-level

disturbances between the West Pokot of Kenya are often reported and 'may be an indication of trickles of arms from South Sudan/Ethiopia seeping into this area'. Forays by armed Ethiopians into the adjacent districts of Kenya have occurred....the lives of numerous traditional peoples have been drastically affected¹⁰.

Insecurity disrupts economic, educational, and social activities such as health facilities necessary for development. Sustainable development will not be realized for a long time in the affected areas. Governments reacting to the prevailing insecurity allocate unbudgeted funds to combat the problem in the affected areas. Such funds would have been utilized in other economic development activities to alleviate the endemic poverty of the region.

INITIATIVES TOWARDS CONTROL OF ILLICIT SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Swadesh Rana, a Senior Political Affairs Officer, from the U. N. Center for Disarmament Affairs reports that, "Although more people have been killed by small arms than major weapons since World War II, none of the measures traditionally associated with arms control can be expected to work effectively in dealing with light weapons"¹¹.

Though this seems to be true in regions infested with illicit small arms and light weapons, we must design strategies to address the problem. We cannot allow the current state of affairs continue and further undermine national and regional political, economic and social stability.

It is gratifying to note that national, regional and international initiatives are being taken to address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as the effects related to the use of such weapons. In Newsletter 1 of November/December 998, the South Africa based Institute of Security Studies (ISS), reports on regional, African and International initiatives to address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Despite such favorable developments, the problem persists. We have yet to implement an effective strategy.

Late 1998, saw three important meetings being held in Europe to further co-operation between the northern and southern countries of the world. In October of the same year, the Belgian government hosted a conference on 'Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development' that brought together participants representing both governments and non-governmental organizations from around the world to develop a call for action. The agenda of the meeting included measures for combating illicit arms trafficking, strengthening national legislation, controlling the possession, use and transfer of small arms and light weapons and developing partnerships to assist and strengthen the capacity of countries in regions of conflict to monitor and control arms accumulations and flows.

The United Nations in October 1998, during the 53rd session of the General Assembly in New York passed two important resolutions. Firstly, the Secretary-General was asked to undertake consultations on the magnitude and scope of illicit small arms trafficking, possible measures to combat the trafficking and the

role the United Nations could play in collecting and sharing information on small arms trafficking. Secondly, the United Nations was to hold an international conference on Illicit arms trade by the year 2001. It further asked the Secretary-General to prepare a report outlining the scope of such a conference, taking into consideration the views of United Nations members¹².

AFRICAN INITIATIVES

The negative impact of proliferation, flow and use of small arms and light weapons in Africa on peace, stability and socio-economic development of the continent is getting the attention of Organization of African Unity, a number of African leaders, governments, non-governmental organizations, and the international community at large to fight against the proliferation and flow of small arms in Africa. "In pursuit of ways and means of trying to solve the problem, Organization of African Unity (OAU) in July 1999 issued a declaration on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons that called for coordinated African solution to the arms trafficking problem"¹³. To indicate its seriousness in having a common African approach to combating illicit arms and its effects in Africa, the 35th OAU summit mandated the OAU Secretary General to convene a regional conference on small arms. The meeting would make recommendations on steps to solve problems related to the transfer and illegal manufacturing of small arms. It was further proposed to convene a preparatory meeting of experts to formulate a joint African approach to the issue prior to the regional conference scheduled for 2000.

An OAU member states Ministerial Meeting on illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons was held in Bamako, Mali, on 1st December 2000, and adopted an African Common Position on the small arms issue. The points adopted included peaceful coexistence among African states, respect of human rights, good governance and efforts towards economic recovery and growth¹⁴.

Thus we have evidence that African states, at the very least, are acknowledging the problem and taking initial stages towards alleviating the region's violence. The meeting also recommended actions to be taken at the national and regional level. It called for a realistic and implementable program of action during the 2001 United Nations Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, which took place in New York from 9-20 July 2001. While the proliferation of weapons and the impact they have on peace, security and development follows similar patterns across the African continent, sub-regional approaches to the problem vary.

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

West African sub-region is plagued with illicit small arms and light weapons. As the negative impact of proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons was felt by the ECOWAS member states, they unanimously came up with ways and means of addressing the problem. "In 1997 ECOWAS member states signed a moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons. At the ECOWAS summit in October 1998, the leaders of West African countries signed the declaration that undertakes to curb the circulation of light weapons in the region"¹⁵. Their concerted effort is bearing fruit as they have managed to control the flow of illicit weapons except in the troubled countries of Liberia and Sierra-Leone. Given their dedication and the concerted effort, their vision is bound to be more successful in the near future.

SOUTHERN AFRICA DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC).

The presence of illicit small arms and light weapons in the Southern African sub-region can be traced to the past regional nationalist, civil wars and the ongoing wars in the republic of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The weapons used and leftover during the Mozambique civil war, the liberalization movements of Zimbabwe and Namibia, and the ongoing civil war in Angola are major contributors to the illicit small arms and light weapons. The impact of the presence of such weapons is mainly being felt by the Republic of South Africa. High rate of motor vehicle theft, high-jacking, bank robberies and general insecurity is currently at an increase throughout South Africa and the other states of Southern Africa. The Southern African Institute of Security Studies (ISS) reports that, "In recognition of the extent of the damages caused to peace and stability in the Southern African Region by the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons, Southern African Development Community (SADC) has made provisions to combat the problem. Various countries in Southern Africa have entered into bilateral or trilateral co-operation agreements around arms control issues"¹⁶.

These arrangements are bearing fruits not only in combating Illicit small arms and light weapons in the region, but also in helping to control motor vehicle thefts, drug trafficking, diamond smuggling and other related crimes.

GREAT LAKES REGION AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

Eastern Africa includes the countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda (see figure1). The United republic of Tanzania, the republic Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), though not members are always invited to attend regional security meetings as events in these countries directly affect the rest of the region.

The ongoing state of insecurity in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to say nothing of the chaos in Somalia and Southern Sudan - has continued to entice a steady source of small arms and light weapons to the rest of the region. Increased awareness that the problem can best be tackled through co-operation, has prompted the member states to come up with regional initiatives for curbing the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. One of the first issues addressed by the newly formed Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) in 1986 (later renamed Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in 1995) was arms control. IGAD has three mandates; to promote economic cooperation, to promote political and humanitarian affairs, and to promote food security and environment protection.

Curbing proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons falls under its third mandate. Since 1996, this regional organization has managed to organize conferences with technical and financial support of the British Department for International Development (DFID), along with the governments of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway. Nongovernmental organizations such as the United Nations African Institute for Prevention of Crime and Offenders (UNAFRI), the International Action Network on Small Arms Transfers (IANSA), the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers and the Institute for Security Studies (in Pretoria, South Africa) actively participated.

These meetings bore fruit on 15th March 2000 when ten Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed a five-point action plan, document named the 'Nairobi Declaration on the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa'. The document called upon member states to rededicate themselves to continue efforts towards the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts. It further stressed the need for the commitment of all parties concerned, as well as the international community, to seize the opportunity to comprehensively address the problem. The document recognized the need for research, data collection, information-sharing and co-operation in all matters relating to illicit small arms and light weapons within the region.

It encouraged a concrete and co-coordinated agenda for action for the sub-region to promote human security. It also aims to ensure that all states have in place adequate laws, regulations and administrative procedures to exercise effective control over the possession and transfer of small arms and light weapons. They advocated the pursuance of positive policies and measures to create social, economic, and political environments to reduce the resort to arms by individuals and communities

The document urged adoption of strong national laws and regulations and control mechanisms to govern civilian possession of arms. States were asked to coordinate and publicize their policies, regulations and laws relating to possession of arms. The arms manufacturing countries were also urged to ensure that all manufacturers, traders, brokers, and transporters of small arms and light weapons are regulated through licensing.

The document authorized states in the sub-region to monitor and effectively control all transactions relating to small arms and light weapons. It further called on these states to strengthen sub-regional co-operation among police, intelligence, customs and border control officials in combating the illicit circulation and trafficking in small arms and light weapons and in suppressing criminal activities related to these weapons.

The United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other regional and international organizations were invited to assist the countries of the region in carrying out a detailed study of the problem. State leaders were encouraged to design programs for the collection and destruction of illicit small arms and light weapons. The States were charged with setting the parameters for this study.

Most of these initiatives were later adopted at the OAU ministerial meeting in Bamako, Mali, where a common African Position was drafted for the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, planned for July 2001 in New York.

RECOMMENDATIONS

REMOVE THEM FROM CIRCULATION.

One way to ensure that small arms and light weapons do not fuel conflicts is stopping or removing them from circulation. Then the fundamental instrument of violence would be curtailed by denying users the tools of violence. We must acknowledge that once the small arms and light weapons are sold, they acquire a life of their own. As we have previously noted, these weapons have a long life and require very little serious maintenance or training for usage. They can easily circulate from one hot spot to another due to the size, weight and they can be readily concealed.

Small arms and light weapons that are acquired by official state systems, such as the armed forces, police and other authorized state security agents, are not a serious problem. These can be controlled and easily accounted for. However, small arms and light weapons in illegal possession and used by irregular groups are a problem. These are the weapons that fuel conflicts, that support political and criminal activities and then cause fear among peace-loving citizens. States have been known to offer moratoriums or amnesty to those holding illegal arms.

This approach has had limited success. But in most cases, outdated models and unserviceable weapons are surrendered, while the serviceable ones are kept.

In the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, billions of dollars have been spent on peace making, relief efforts, and settlement of refugees by the affected states and international sympathizers - all with little or no success. If a portion of what is spent on the after effects of conflicts is spent on collecting and destroying small arms and light weapons, the intensity and violence of conflicts would have been greatly reduced. Further, peace making would have been expedited.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Measures of conflict resolution will not succeed without creating job opportunities for able-bodied citizens. In the case of most, if not all of the countries of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, there are insufficient jobs for qualified applicants. There are many idle young people who can easily be used by unscrupulous groups to commit acts that are contrary to the laws of the nations. Idle minds are always the den of the devil.

It is a reality that due to the world economic recession and the effects of globalization, we are witnessing a lack of employment opportunities throughout the world, more so in under-developed or developing nations. But a sluggish global economy should not be a reason for the states to cease efforts to industrialize and modernize now more than ever. Under developed countries should seek the assistance of donor countries and agencies like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Able-bodied people in these conflict-prone areas must be provided with employment opportunities so they do not resort to illicit arms as a means of survival. Granting loans and providing training for skilled jobs can alleviate this problem of armed violence and regional instability.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

It is sad to note that most illicit small arms and light weapons currently in circulation are spill-overs from earlier conflicts that have bedeviled the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. The conflicts to a greater extent were contributed by non observance of democracy, human rights and good governance. This situation became breeding grounds and conducive environment of armed conflicts. To address the issues of governance and human rights in East Africa, the member states created an article in the treaty establishing East African Community that reads; "good governance including adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law, accountability, transparency, social justice, equal opportunities, gender equality, as well as

the recognition, promotion of human and peoples rights in accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on human and Peoples Rights"17. Positive enactments of these provisions prevent the citizens from resorting to armed insurrection using illicit arms.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

Petty intra or inter-state quarrels in if not solved quickly, usually explode and get out of control. Early detection and prevention of such conflict is important. Conflict prevention should be given appropriate political and diplomatic attention. One effective tool is utilization of indigenous methods of conflict resolution. Whenever possible, regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) have the authority and capacity to arbitrate and settle disputes among the member states.

REHABILITATION OF DEMOBILIZED COMBATANTS

Demobilized combatants and poorly rehabilitated criminals can easily fall back to their old trades. Each state has the moral duty to ensure that such groups or persons are rightly employed or are assisted to in preparing to earn an honest living. The United Nations and other NGO's have the resources to facilitate human rehabilitation. The important thing is to deny ex-combatants or criminals and such other groups the use of their skills with the gun.

RECONSTRUCTION OF COLLAPSED STATES

Collapsed or collapsing states within the region must be reconstructed so that they no longer provide illegal small arms and light weapons. Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo are all such sources. Illicit arms originate and spread from them to the rest of the region and beyond. Kenya found itself flooded with illicit small arms and light weapons following the collapse of Said Barre's regime and the disintegration of the Somalia nation and army. Then came increased cattle rustling, destruction of wild game through poaching, banditry, motor vehicle high-jacking, and frequent bank robberies.

The instability in Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic republic of the Congo portends more illicit arms flow. Out of the chaos in these countries, illicit small arms and light weapons are arising in the neighboring states of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, causing a wave of insecurity and fostering underdevelopment. Regional organizations with the assistance of international organizations, should make strong efforts to rehabilitate such states and thereby stabilize the region.

ARMING OF GROUPS

Governments within the region have been known to arm home guards as a defense against attacks from other tribes or nationalist groups pursuing either independence, economic or separatist goals. For example, Southern Sudan dissidents were armed by the neighboring countries and other foreign countries with vested interests in the Sudan. Such arms often end up being sold and used against nationals of the governments which supplied the weapons. Kenya's arming of Pokot tribesmen and Uganda's of the Teso has had the boomerang effect.

POVERTY ELEVATION/ERADICATION

Poverty is the root cause of most urban and rural criminal activities, such as cattle-rustling, carjacking, burglaries, armed robberies, murders, land disputes and other conflicts. Most of those who resort to such activities are not always the illiterates, but also the learned and without jobs. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the great world powers spent billions of dollars arming allies to fight their ideological wars. But they did little to improve the standard of living of these so-called allies. Many of those Cold War weapons supplied have ended up in the hands of the wrong groups. They continue to cause havoc in the affected countries and the region.

The Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa are no different. Shouldn't the great powers now invest in efforts to alleviate poverty in order to remove the demand for small arms and light weapons? After all, they contributed significantly to the problem.

Dependence on cattle raising in the semi arid and arid areas of Kenya, Uganda and Somalia is contributing to the proliferation of illicit arms. These governments must develop alternative means of income, such as agriculture through the use of irrigation and provision of the necessary infrastructure such as access roads, telephones, and electricity. In most cases, Such areas were neglected by the colonial governments, and little or nothing has been done to develop them since attainment of independence.

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa is a reality. It poses a serious problem to the entire region. Use of these weapons has aggravated violence, caused deaths of thousands of non-combatants, and destabilized the political and socio-economic development in the region. If this situation is left unchecked, it may be a major cause of other grave human problems in the future.

Illicit small arms and light weapons originate from all sorts of sources - external, local, and states. Some are homemade weapons. Elimination of these tools of conflict is desirable to

defuse the conflicts. Both long-term and short-term measures are needed to alleviate the problems of poverty, ethnic animosity, bad governance, and other social evils. All of these are underlying reasons for taking arms and fighting. Conflicts lead to more proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. Until the instruments of violence are eradicated, it will be extremely difficult to resolve the underlying causes of regional conflicts. Current initiatives, though laudable, are insufficient. Regional leaders must cooperatively disarm the regions populace. To do this, they need global support, especially from the wealthy and powerful nations that formally used the region as a Cold War battlefield.

WORD COUNT = 6,216

ENDNOTES

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