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from a regional perspective*



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**Dealing with the problem of illicit traffic of fire arms
from a regional perspective**

Small Arms and Development in Post–Conflict Societies

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Notebook No. 6

Contents

Presentation	7
I. Introduction	9
II. Security and Development during the Transition Period	13
III. Small Arms and Development	28
Notes	41

Presentation

On December 29, 1996, the Peace Accords were signed in Guatemala after 36 years of internal conflict. At that moment, the process of building a society based on equality and justice began. However, the journey is not easy and new risks have arisen during the transition process which threatens achievement of a firm and lasting peace. Guatemala shares a series of similar characteristics with the entire Central American region – particularly with El Salvador and Honduras – regarding the Security Sector Reform and agreement on, and coordination of responses by governments, to address the problems which are arising in the economic, social, and security sphere.

This document proposes that peace processes are not always sufficient, if they take place in societies with a certain degree of institutionalization but which are facing serious social and economic needs as well. And, above all, we want to highlight the role of the proliferation of firearms owned by civilians in intensifying poverty and leading to a lack of governance in post-conflict societies.

Within this context, several organizations of the Central American region have convened – IEPADES being one of them – to address the problem of Security Sector Reform and governance in a coordinated manner, with a common vision, and from a regional perspective. The proliferation of arms in our countries and the impact on populations and border authorities is one of the core aspects in the work carried out by the Network, based on community practices and influencing public policy. We hope that this document will contribute to the debate on the link between the proliferation of arms, insecurity, and poverty, which is getting stronger each day.

Carmen Rosa de León-Escribano
Guatemala, July 2006

I. Introduction

After several peace processes, Central America is struggling to achieve consolidation of democracy, governance, and peace. National phenomena are increasingly transcending borders and transforming into situations which are common to most of the neighbor countries. The region is flanked by a variety of conflicts in addition to its own conflicts, produced by the changing security and development models. Furthermore, Central America is battling with its geographic situation as a pathway to Colombia, and to Mexico and the United States.

Drugs, organized crime, arms, emigrants – all of them pass through this large corridor into which the region has been transformed. Institutional weakness in the countries – some of them in post–conflict situations and others in the process of consolidating a State Reform – favors all types of trafficking of objects and persons. The problem of an increasing buildup of arms is linked to deteriorating citizen security, weak police forces, an absence of policy to foster cooperation between States, and the lack of priorities established by governments regarding the subject of security.

While proliferation of arms and rates of death through firearms are increasing in the region, neither governments nor civil society perceive the fight against this problem as a priority. Small firearms are linked to all security problems in the countries: At a local level, to youth gangs, common crime, and organized crime, as well as the geometric growth of private security enterprises; and at an international level, illicit trafficking of drugs, merchandise, and persons is linked to the use of arms as well. Open conflicts which flank the region favor access to, trading, and commercialization of all types of armaments.

Illicit trafficking of arms is one of the most pernicious problems. It affects government stability because irregular groups are provided with arms or because citizen insecurity becomes a topic of permanent social dissatisfaction. At a continental level, this issue causes a focus of latent instability that can transform into internal or border conflicts.

The use, carrying, dissemination, and international trade of firearms is a complex and violent phenomenon which affects each level of development in Central American societies. *“There are clear signs which show that small firearms – as instruments of violence – contribute to human and social destruction, endangering human rights and the rule of law and undermining political stability and economic development.”ⁱ*

Violence does not happen by itself in the Central American region, nor does it occur in isolated cases. Essentially, violence is the consequence of a political culture which has been shaped by historical and social factors. Advantages are attributed to the use of violence compared to other means of addressing conflict, such as negotiation or formal administration of justice. A society which has faced an internal war is a fragmented society that is divided by fear and distrust as a result of the conflict situation. A society which has just come out of a war solves conflicts through violence, at a personal level within the family, and at a community and national level as well.

One of the characteristics of the conflicts in the Central American region is citizen participation in direct confrontation, either as members of groups supporting guerilla groups or as members of paramilitary groups established by the Army.

This situation causes an approach to social issues where eliminating the enemy is the preferred aim – not dialogue and searching for alternative solutions. This behavior, when adopted by different sectors in a society, leads to a practice of daily violence which becomes the great obstacle to consolidating peace processes. The agreements between governments and insurgent forces within the region, which are oriented toward building democratic and peaceful societies, are colliding during the implementation process, causing opposed and divided societies with no vision of a nation where the strongest always wins.

Populations in such an environment associate the idea of carrying arms to security. The use of arms is a part of everyday life for all those individuals who have directly participated in conflict. A significant number of adult populations have served in the Army, guerilla, or paramilitary groups. They all know how to handle arms and are used to them. This, added to the fact that arms are readily

available and easy to acquire – especially the ones that have kept circulating after the conflict – leads to an armed society which is used to believing that it is safeguarding security through the use of arms.

In many cases, more attention is given to disarming combatant armies or guerilla groups during demobilization than disarming populations who have collaborated with either of them. Population groups that were organized and structured for combat keep their training, habits, structure, and arms but without leaders or any control mechanisms. The criterion for the use of arms becomes an individual decision at this momentⁱⁱ. It is easy to be tempted to use arms for personal benefit – individually or in gangs. The process of reintegration of ex-combatants is a key element, not only from an employment perspective but also in terms of restructuring thinking and participation mechanisms in a democratic society. If this is not achieved it transforms into a latent problem, hindering governance and democracy in post-conflict scenarios.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to experts in the region^{iv}, more than two million firearms are circulating throughout the Central American Isthmus, excluding inventories of small and light firearms held by military and public security forces. The figure would be close to four million if all firearms, explosives, and grenade launchers were to be included.

In addition to high homicide rates, other effects of the proliferation of small firearms owned by civilians are social violence, common crime and organized crime, as well as proliferation of private security enterprises due to difficulty in fully developing the new police forces which are being established. Private enterprises in most countries within the region have three times more armed staff than police forces. Within this scenario of restructuring democratic institutionality and changes in development in post-conflict countries, the proliferation of small firearms becomes a potential threat to governance and consolidation of peace and democracy, and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in terms of development.

A decade after the signing of the Peace Accords in the Central American region, institutional, political, and social consequences of the armed conflicts that took place in the countries do not allow overcoming the post-conflict situation. Within the framework of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) it seems that institutionality is

not able to implement the actions required to reduce the high level of insecurity. In addition, regional and continental tensions are having a bearing on incomplete processes of security reform – and are in fact causing backward steps in processes. Structural social and economic needs, on the other hand, have apparently not been met in a scenario of increasing inequality and lack of justice. A vicious circle between insecurity and poverty is set in motion, with one being the detonator for the other. Within this context, arms in the hands of civilians have become an obstacle to governance. Above all, they are an obstacle for societies – who have built the possibility of signing the Peace Accords through lost lives and sacrifice – to be able to consolidate a full development at all levels, based upon inclusion, equality, and justice, with freedom.

II. Security and Development during the Transition Period

Armed conflicts tend to cause devastating harm in a society. If the root cause of the conflict is the demand of economic and social satisfactors in inequitable societies, it can be observed that when the conflict ends, the original causes not only continue intact but will most likely increase in subsequent years. In the case of Guatemala, ten years after the signing of the Peace Accords more Guatemalans die a violent death each day than during the years of internal armed conflict.

This leads us to rethink peace processes and the thesis of building democracy through negotiation tables and peace accords. In view of the results in the Central American region, while it cannot be denied that the signing of the Peace Accords has re-stimulated economic growth in some sectors, the serious problems of inequality and injustice have not yet been resolved but rather have increased. In addition, an environment of insecurity prevails which includes all social sectors and which is turning into a great threat to investment and development.

United Nations has developed methodologies for negotiation in situations of armed conflict between countries and regions, and has also been successful in ending long-term internal conflicts. Therefore, when observing how these efforts - which yielded important results at the beginning - are diminished by apparent backward steps within countries, some of the possible causes need to be analyzed. In the case of Central America we can focus on two main points: Deteriorating citizen security and an increasing social and economic inequality. The paradox is that conflicts were a result of trying to stop the violence exercised against citizens by the State itself, on one hand, and improving situations of inequality, poverty, and exclusion which affected large sectors of the population, on the other hand.

Security Model and Security Sector Reform: Internal Factors

In the realm of citizen security, it should be considered that a transformation of the security model as proposed by the Peace Accords cannot be implemented in the short term in many cases. A transition from a model based on the "*Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional*" (National Security Doctrine) to a model based on the concept of Human Security or Democratic Security has been made in the Central American region. The first concept can basically be summarized as a focus which was imposed on the region by the United States. Under this system each individual or group who could be suspected of agreeing with the ideas of Communism was perceived as the Internal Enemy. As a result, resources of a State focused on the armed forces were used to confront, attack, and eliminate this possible enemy. This involved a militarized, vertical, authoritarian, exclusive State where interactions with citizens were based on fear and repression as mechanisms of control and dissuasion.

Toward the end of the Cold War agreements and processes^v were promoted within the region based on the notion of security as the foundation for achieving development. Two concepts were coined almost simultaneously: *Democratic Security*^{vi}, which includes respect for Human Rights and the fight against poverty as elements linked to security; and the concept of *Human Security*, which was established by United Nations. The new dimensions of security are reflected in the Peace Accords in El Salvador and Guatemala and in the Security Sector Reform (SSR) processes in both countries within the region.

This conceptual change regarding security involves a new way of thinking and implementing security: From a perspective of an inclusive State, focused on prevention and guaranteeing basic rights for the population, and where participation is developed as a mechanism for interaction with society. The principles, followed in SSR in post-conflict situations, have basically led to decisions related to dividing functions between the armed forces and the police force; creating a new police force; reforming the legal system; and strengthening civil power in terms of security.

However, changes in the model also involve changes in security institutions. In situations of long-term conflict the objective is trying to change and transform not only the internal structure of police institutions. Mechanisms to interact with society, procedures, and attitudes need to be changed as well, and new behavior patterns and knowledge need to be acquired. This is true for individuals and institutions who have developed patterns of violent and authoritarian behavior to face conflict in the past. Thus, a transition process is taking place and security forces are required to transform entirely in order to adjust to the new model, but in practice they are still acting in accordance with the knowledge and behavior learned under the previous security model. The results are reflected in institutional crisis: A new doctrine based on prevention is promoted, on one hand, and – in view of the increasing demand for security – authorities tend to respond with violence and repression, reverting to attitudes and behavior of the recent past.

In post-conflict processes, different models coexist and are confronted within institutions and with society. Long internal wars, above all, produce societies who address conflict through responses based on violence and a disproportionate exercise of force. In its most inhuman expression this takes on the form of lynching, which occurs in some societies that are undergoing a transition process.

In most cases, past actions by security and defense forces during the armed conflict cause a rejection by affected populations. This fact, together with the increasing insecurity in post-conflict countries and the difficult process of institutional transition, leads to a loss of credibility by security and defense forces. The lack of credibility affects police forces in the first place, and also traverses organizations which are responsible for investigation and the administering of law, gradually leading the population to lose faith in the legal system. This increases the tendency to address conflict situations through violence – on the fringes of the rule of law – affecting the process of strengthening democracy and endangering governance.

The Circle of Lack of Security and Poverty

The second axis of root causes for conflict which tend to remain unresolved in post-conflict processes is related to structural problems regarding social, political, and economic exclusion. The disillusionment of populations who do not receive the expected benefits ends up exacerbating protests and demands by social movements. Within the context of responses by authorities which continue being repressive, and in view of the absence of long-term public policy effectively prioritizing the fight against inequality and poverty, social demands tend to transform into “threats” to security, causing a “securitization”^{vii} of the development agenda.

Post-conflict processes in countries with low development rates tend to transform into vicious circles, and the following situations can be observed a decade or more after the signing of the Peace Accords:

- A high level of insecurity;
 - Weak institutional;
 - A lack of long-term public policy;
 - A volatile system^{viii} of political parties which represent interests of groups and sectors, lacking a State vision;
 - Entrepreneurial sectors which promote reduction of the State and reduction of taxes;
 - High poverty and extreme poverty rates;
 - An increase in inequality;
 - Excluding large social or cultural groups from the system;
 - Depending on international cooperation for projects oriented toward strengthening social services;
 - An increase in security expenses with a repressive orientation;
 - A collapsing legal system due to a lack of investigation and overflowing prisons;
 - A elevated number of young people who are not included in the formal education system;
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- An exclusive economic system where labor demand does not increase;
 - A high proportion of informal economy;
 - A repositioning of the armed forces in the area of citizen security.

The rigidity of economic systems and the lack of capacity by the State to provide basic services to the population are reflected by the absence of an equitable economic growth and an increasing gap between those who are getting wealthier and those who enter into the category of extreme poverty each day. In the case of Central America, the answer to the lack of employment in this exclusive process is found in emigration. The fact that 25% of the Central American population is living – illegally, in most cases – in the United States is no coincidence.

According to ILANUD^{ix} six correlations exist between the social and economic situation and the increase of delinquency in a country, including the following:

- Levels of young population;
- Young people who are outside the formal education system;
- Low levels of employment;
- High levels of inequality;
- A low level of consumption;
- Level of urbanization.

The above correlations, together with the conditions that prevail in countries undergoing transition processes or post-conflict countries, show the levels of lack of governance which lie ahead, in a scenario which seems to be getting more complicated and slowly transforming into a pre-conflict situation.

On one hand, a tendency of institutional weakening, the absence of public policy, and temporary and repressive responses in the fight against the increasing lack of security can be observed. On the other hand, large population groups with unmet needs are unable to find a mechanism to channel their demands; masses of young people lack access to education or employment and tend to gather in groups to commit crimes. And facing this situation: a State without the economic capacity to meet demands; a lack of investment due to increasing insecurity and

the absence of strong legal norms and law enforcement; a State which will address social dynamics through the use of police forces that are in the process of transforming, with an ambivalence between the doctrine of prevention and the use of repression command by authorities.

The result: A significant lack of governance and a collapse of the system, which can neither solve the issue of insecurity (because it focus in repression, not prevention) nor meet social demands. This occurs within the vacuum produced by a system of immature political parties which do not act as intermediaries between the population and the Government and which are designed to represent interests of specific groups. Parties turn into vehicles that disappear after each election. This shows that a long-term vision does not exist. Resources are increased to temporarily address current matters – in terms of security and social infrastructure – and the idea of a structural transformation is abandoned because it requires more time. All this creates a vicious circle of even more poverty and insecurity.

Security Model and Security Sector Reform: External Factors

In addition to the above mentioned problems, external factors come into play which affect consolidation of democracy. Organized and transnational crime finds elements which favor inserting and deeply entrenching in bureaucratic structures in weak States in a transition process, and thus becomes a part of public administration. The subsequent demobilization and transformation of the security forces, which have centralized the power and the State's information mechanisms, facilitates the development of parallel structures by former members of the security forces, taking advantage of existing networks of informers and collaborators. In addition, tactics which were developed during the war are used, leading – in some cases – to literally laying siege on urban or rural sectors where State security forces are not able to enter.

In order to enable operations by the above mentioned criminal structures the legal apparatus needs to be immobilized, which in turn creates impunity networks within the system. This is one of the reasons why populations tend to lose faith in

justice by legal means and feels helpless regarding organized crime. In addition, police forces are not able to consolidate the new institutionality.

Within this context, Central American countries are facing a new situation as a result of September 11, 2001 and the restructuring of the foreign security policy of the United States. The Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) was established in March 2005, proposing a series of coordinated actions between Canada, Mexico and the United States. Topics range from addressing natural disaster situations and surveillance of borders to joint economic agendas. This partnership, whose Presidents and Prime Minister meet every year, has moved the northern border to Guatemala and thus, includes the entire Central American region. Changes in terms of a SSR – in the area of sub-regional and hemispheric security – which have taken place in the past five years, are therefore nothing extraordinary.

Key effects include the following:

- Reverting to strengthening armies to provide citizen security, to the detriment of civil police forces;
 - Reverting to the concept of "Internal Enemy";
 - A harsher migratory policy;
 - Considering ethnic conflicts as a threat; different conceptions regarding territorial integrity and socio-cultural, religious, economic, linguistic, and political differences;
 - Favoring repressive actions to address dissatisfaction and fight against crime, disregarding dialogue and prevention;
 - Actions are mainly performed by the State, eliminating mechanisms for civil society participation;
 - A weakening of the democratic framework and the validity of human rights, reverting to the thesis of national security;
 - Rebuilding armies and police forces within the Central American region with a vision of regional armies and bodies;
 - Social issues like youth gangs become threats that are put on a level with terrorism and drug trafficking.
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In summary, advances in terms of a SSR – within the new context of building democracy that has been developed after the signing of the Peace Accords – are counteracted by this approach of regional security, which is a step backward. This is true even without considering that armies promoted White Books of Defense and new doctrines as part of the division of functions which has been established in the El Salvador and Guatemala Peace Accords and the SSR that was implemented through political processes in Honduras and Nicaragua. It is paradoxical that current actions related to citizen security in the above mentioned countries, supported by the South Commando of North American Armed Forces, are contradicting the functions and missions which had been established through their own planning.

New Problems

The new security scenario in post-conflict countries in Central America also includes elements which have arisen in recent years. The following three elements can be highlighted: The establishment and growth of private security enterprises; the role of gangs of young people, especially in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and proliferation of small arms and ammunition in the above mentioned countries. All three phenomena are closely linked, and the long awaited access to security and peace in Central Americans is dependent upon them.

Private security enterprises have significantly grown in the region. In some cases they are four times stronger than police forces and twice as strong as armed forces and security forces combined. Lax legal frameworks; an absence of minimum training requirements; an absence of training; and deficient or non-existent control mechanisms turn private enterprises into elements of distortion of citizen security. On one hand, they presuppose a control mechanism by the population which is not included within the framework of social audit and central actions by authorities. On the other hand, they are no more than proof of the lack of capacity by the State to provide security for the entire society, and are yet

another expression of inequality in the countries, since only those who can pay for this type of security services have access to them.

Privatization of security can not only be clearly seen in the use of human resources but also in technology investment, and even in investigation and negotiating with kidnappers. Links with ex members of State security forces are found in private security enterprises, who are also involved in import and commercialization of arms. Private enterprises often manage larger arsenals than the police force. All this occurs within a context of deficient control mechanisms and regulation: Individuals are hired with weapons of their own, or there simply is a continuous turnover of arms which facilitates introducing many of those arms into the black market. A significant number of cases in the region has been recorded where members of private security businesses have attacked and even killed other citizens, showing a lack of technification and training to use force in a proportionate manner or even to handle firearms appropriately.

Youth gangs - which reflect an absence of specific policy regarding young people - are a problem trying to be transformed into a threat to State security, with the armed forces in the region being responsible to address it. This phenomenon has been widely studied based on its effects and possible causes, which are all associated to the absence of a development framework which emphasizes education and employment. However, an analysis oriented toward recognizing internal codes of the groups has yet to be implemented. In addition, motivations and identity-building that young people are developing through the networks which they build should be closer examined. In terms of police and security forces, a definition of the concept of gang does not exist, and different modes of youth groups are not categorized. The lack of knowledge regarding this situation causes a general criminalization of young people, thus developing practices which violate human rights and the right to free expression and free movement. It should be acknowledged that some of these groups do establish regional and transnational networks, associated to organized crime and illicit trafficking of persons, arms, or drugs. These groups are known as "*maras*", and their origin can be traced back to the streets of suburban neighborhoods in several cities in the United States. Gangs are established by children of Latin immigrants who are deported to their countries of origin due to minor crime and - once they have returned to the region - get organized at a national and regional

level. Their actions include establishing links with groups of organized crime, thus facilitating trafficking activities. These are complex groups with hierarchy and loyalty systems; they defend specific territories; they identify with the organization through a discourse which is almost ideological and even religious in nature; and their main strength is the use of arms, territorial control, and fear. A third wave of the phenomenon is reaching European countries with a high number of Latin American immigrants. In a society in transition – where values have been lost after an armed conflict; where poverty levels and lack of education affect mostly young people; where disintegrated families are becoming a part of the urban process – children are pushed on the streets, and sooner or later they will have to seek a group to find protection and identify with its members despite all costs involved.

In view of the increasing growth of this phenomenon, regional policy promoted by the United States incorporates the phenomenon of the *“maras”* into the threats to regional security, and therefore has fostered involvement of armies within the region in the fight against gangs. This decision not only raises the thesis of the "Internal Enemy" again but also makes it appear as a transregional situation and situates the solution to the problem within a military realm and the fight against insurgent groups. All this despite the fact that strict policy against *“maras”* which has been implemented in Honduras and El Salvador has failed to reduce violence related to the phenomenon but rather, has increased it. While police forces are now reverting to the vision of prevention in coordination with educational and economic instances of the State, Central American armies are joining to provide a military response to a complex situation of delinquency which is the result of exclusion and inequality.

Latin America is the continent with the highest rate of cases of death by firearms that are not associated to armed conflict. This means that most of the individuals using firearms in Latin America are civilians. Almost 70% of the victims are teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19^x. More Central Americans die due to firearms today – with peace having been declared – than during armed conflicts which have affected the region in the past.

One of the main causes for the high homicide rate in the region is the **proliferation of small arms and ammunitions**. If transactions between States have accounted for most arms which entered legally in the past – in addition to the

arsenals of guerilla groups – a fact which characterizes the post-conflict phenomenon is that today these transactions have been replaced by the commercial sale of small arms among private actors. The small arms are the causes of 80% of the deaths in the Central America region. In the region, Guatemala, El Salvador y Honduras have the highest rates of casualties.

Death rate for each 100 thousand inhabitants ^{xi}					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Rate	55.66	50.36	46.7	12.24	7.45

Percentage of Homicides by fire arms ^{xii}					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Rate	81%	76%	76%	56%	58%

Violent Deaths produced by fire arms ^{xiii}					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
2003	3,453	1,697	2,500	nd	156
2004	3,643	2,031	2,346	nd	164

From a geo-strategic perspective, the Central American region has been – and is – a pathway to the North and the South. Bartering is increasingly becoming the fastest way to do illicit transactions, and arms are a frequent means of payment today. Arms tend to rotate constantly; cases have been known where they have changed owner and country. Thus, the growing phenomenon of recirculation of arms is one of the obstacles in tracking and investigating crimes committed at a national level. The arsenal that is circulating in Central America includes illicit arms, legally registered arms which have been stolen from their original owners, legal arms which have entered the black market, and arms which have been

diverted from State inventories. Arms which are the means to kill an average of 30 Central Americans each day enter the illegal market in the following ways, in addition to the above mentioned:

- Arms which were not handed in after the conflict during DDR processes;
- Arms coming from or requested by other countries in conflict within the region;
- Arms for organized crime;
- Small-scale illicit smuggling across borders;
- Production of makeshift weapons;
- Poor mechanisms to control trade, ownership, and use;
- Poor mechanisms to control inventories of arms used by State security forces;
- A high turnover of arms within private security enterprises;
- Obsolete and permissive legal frameworks.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), three factors have an impact on the use of small firearms: Availability, variety, and cultural norms for the use of this type of arms. All three variables are found in post-conflict countries. Availability, due to the conflict and its remnants; variety, because arms from different groups and demobilized forces are circulating, and populations learn to resolve problems – from family issues to traffic accidents – through violence after having been immersed in conflict situations for several years.

Nearly one million legally registered arms exist in Central America, and estimates from different sources show that more than two million additional arms are not registered. Including arms held by military and security forces, almost four million arms are estimated to exist in the region.

In addition to the arms which have been accumulating in the Central American region, the role of the region as a pathway toward North and South should also be considered, as well as its geographic proximity to the Caribbean. Central America has been transformed into a large space for the flow of arms,

which change owners, are exchanged for other goods, and circulate illicitly to be used by civilians, insurgent groups, paramilitary groups, gangs, and organized crime.

Indicators for Legal fire arms and licences to bear them ^{xiv}					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Registered Arms	253,514	149,719	151,003	90,133	148,000
Licences to bear arms	34,200	149,719	151,003	83,035	43,241

Estimate of illegal fire arms in Central America ^{xv}					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
LEGAL ARMS	1,800,000	280,000	650,000	160,000	97,000

The region has mostly maritime borders, and given the poor governmental capacity to patrol borders and coastal waters it is almost impossible to guard them. On the other hand, land borders are highly permeable and poorly marked, and governments lack the capacity to appropriately patrol the large expanse of borders. In this scenario of permanent demand for and continuous turnover of arms, as a result of the connivance of commercial enterprises and corrupt government officials Central America has been transformed into one of the regions with the highest number of armed civilians.

Political Parties and Parliaments

The political party system has changed during the transition process, after the end of internal armed conflicts in Central American countries. During or prior to the conflict, scenarios existed where political parties with majority

representation in Congress supported the counter-insurgent policy of the Army and served as a vehicle for military to not only gain military power but political power as well, on one hand. Political opposition representatives, on the other hand – who were subject to persecution and suspicion and were a minority in Congress – continuously proposed debates on public policy. And outside the formal political system guerilla groups were trying to bring about change through the use of arms.

After the signing of the Peace Accords, two scenarios can be observed:

- In one scenario, political forces which existed prior to the conflict regroup. The party that formerly supported the military regime is transformed and now includes entrepreneurs and conservative sectors, and the former guerilla becomes the main opposition political party. Political polarization in this scheme is significant and tends to diminish the weight of center political parties until they almost disappear in some stages of the election process. In this scenario, the party system is strong but political consensus becomes difficult.
- In the other scenario, a tendency to deideologize the entire political system can be observed, caused to a certain degree by a systematic weakening of the civil and political power which was a part of the Army's counter-insurgent discourse, aimed at substituting civil authorities by military power in the war zones, in the same manner as was done within the State apparatus. In this scenario, the guerilla transforms into a political party but is fragmented after the first elections. A few parties have been established only very recently which have survived three election periods and have participated in government. The parties include those which represent the interests of the business sector and those who are grouped around military figures. Political parties which operated before and during the armed conflict are gradually disappearing, and political groups with no ideology are being established and barely survive one election period. As a result, political agreements are made to serve group interests and with a short-term vision.

One of the phenomena faced by countries in post-conflict situations is the absence of a regulatory framework which adjusts to changes in the security sector required by the Peace Accords. This involves not only a reform of

existing laws but a new legal system which gives coherence and structure to changes in the sector, including relevant topics such as circulation and proliferation of firearms and operation of private security enterprises.

In this regard, a weak political system undergoing a transition process is reflected in a Congress which is more oriented toward serving the interests of those sectors with the ability of exerting pressure. Given that the business of firearms and the provision of private security services produce millions in the region, these groups are becoming the main obstacles to achieving restrictive legislation and effectively controlling the trade and use of arms by civilians. The absence of clear norms and a lack of compliance with international and regional treaties such as *Inter-American Convention against Illicit Manufacture and Dealing of Fire Arms, Ammunitions, Explosives and other Related Materials*, create an environment of impunity for private transactions due to a lack of registers, triangulation among countries, and poor control mechanisms for entrance and distribution routes.

III. Small Arms and Development

We have observed that the dynamics of insecurity and poverty are indissolubly linked. In the same manner, proliferation of arms in societies which are unstable due to weak institutionality and a high level of unmet needs becomes one of the factors which trigger insecurity, and this, in turn, triggers poverty. In addition, governance is affected by the presence of firearms in the hands of citizens who are accustomed to using them as a means to resolve conflict. Permissiveness of laws and misuse of arms are additional elements which hinder consolidation of the rule of law. Furthermore, the economy of small firearms is an integral part of the threat to collective security faced by vulnerable States, especially those with a developing institutionality.

Achieving development and improving quality of life are clearly the elements which need to be established as objectives in consolidating peace processes. Human development is what will turn democracy into a reality for post-conflict countries. Therefore, it is fundamental to establish links between security and development, and the impact of proliferation and misuse of arms on both aspects – especially arms held by civilians.

Development with a Human Face: Human Security

The foundation to achieving development is focusing on security, but a security which holds the individual as the subject of development. This means that security is the foundation to guaranteeing access to basic resources, education, health, food, housing, employment, and fair distribution of income.

In 1994, The UNDP Human Development Report specifically referred to the link between the concept of sustainable development and a new concept of Human Security, which was defined as “safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression” and “protection from sudden and prejudicial alterations

of the patterns of daily life, at home, at work, or in the community". United Nations has listed the categories for human security: Economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, social security, and political security.

Thus, human security can be considered as the objective of the condition to achieve sustainable development. The above mentioned areas are key elements in assessing the possible impact of the transfer of arms on sustainable development. This is crucial if we consider that United Nations has established the year 2015 as the year for the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved – the possibility of survival for millions of people around the world.

Millennium Development Goals and the Impact of Arms

a. Reduce by Half Extreme Poverty and Hunger:

Indiscriminate use and circulation of firearms mark the difference between lesser crime and homicide. In addition, violence exerted through the use of firearms owned by civilians not only creates a permanent fear in the population but also, affects development in its entirety. Studies have been carried out by Inter-American (IDB) Development Bank and the World Bank on the cost of deaths and injury by firearms for a society. An IDB^{xvi} study which was published in 1999 estimates that the cost of crime, including the value of stolen property, is approximately US\$16.8 million each year, or an additional 14.2% of the Latin American region's GNP. Other social costs would add another 4.9% of the regional GNP and would include costs of loss of life and health, police and criminal justice system expenses, and the cost of private security services.

The use of firearms to commit crimes affects the daily development of trade and the labor environment. In societies such as the Central American societies – where informal economy accounts for a significant part of income generation – assaults and homicide related to theft have a negative impact on the quality of life of the population. On the other hand, they hinder free movement and disturb the movement of persons and merchandise, thus affecting access to and dynamism of the markets.

Criminal actions have a negative impact on the development of economies in any of their production branches. In agriculture, the presence of groups of criminals affects production processes, leading to abandonment of crops because

of lack of transportation (due to assaults) and lands left without being used for agricultural production. Industrial and commercial sectors are witnessing an increase in operation costs due to the need to pay for private security services. This situation particularly affects micro-enterprises and hinders their growth. On the other hand, actions of organized groups include robbing banks, vehicles which transport valuables, and other vehicles, with the resulting costs for insurance companies. Again, only those who can afford paying for security and prevention have access to some kind of protection.

The absence of legal certainty, together with insecurity, does not attract foreign capital investment. In addition, the fear of local enterprises to provide evidence of increases in revenue to criminals hinders the expansion of businesses. Thus, possibilities to create more employment and wealth are lost. In countries with cultural and environmental resources which can be used to attract tourism, high insecurity levels discourage actions and deprive local sectors of the advantages of these types of economic activities.

The phenomenon of gangs is not only an urban problem. In some cases, it is linked to migration to the United States - for example, individuals from communities with a high rate of indigenous population, in the case of Guatemala. Young people who are deported to their country of origin sow fear in small villages upon their return. Communities have reached internal agreements in some cases to ban these young people from the village by sanctioning their families. In other cases where the situation cannot be controlled migration of the population to urban areas is stimulated, thus increasing security-related problems and pressure on services and land. In other cases, families decide to emigrate to another country, trying to escape from a situation of constant insecurity.

In terms of development and the fight against poverty, the role of NGOs is crucial. However, less and less organizations are working in areas with an obvious increase in insecurity, violence, and the use of arms, basically due to fear for the lives of their members or fear of the violence used to resolve problems and demands. This is also the case with State institutions oriented toward development. As a result, areas affected by violence - which also are the poorest areas - are increasingly abandoned and excluded.

One of the most devastating effects for societies in a conflict situation – especially in cases of long-term conflict – is the destruction of the social fabric. The consequences regarding participation in reconstruction processes and consolidation of democracy are unquestionable. The destruction of the fabric involves the destruction of basic forms of coexistence, affects functions within communities and families, and distorts culture. The fact that women and children are involved in conflicts, play active roles within a scheme of violence, and get used to violence, marks the history of populations and has a negative impact on the possibility of rebuilding communities, decision-making processes, and cultural patterns which existed prior to the conflict. This gets even more difficult if reconstruction is to be carried out in a post-conflict scenario with the emergence of groups that continue using violence through arms as a lifestyle, in view of the weakness of institutions and local authorities.

In this community context, and considering the weakness of the political system being built, election processes are transforming into mechanisms of access to political power for those who hold economic resources – which were amassed as a result of the very conflict, in many cases – or who sow fear in communities through the use of armed groups. Cases of Congress members linked to smuggling, drug trafficking, trafficking of arms and ammunitions, and trafficking in persons have been known in several countries within the region. Communities become battlefields again, and decisions regarding municipalities are made according to the illicit business of criminal groups, thus eliminating the possibilities for development favored by the Government or by external donors and NGOs. In some cases, entire populations participate in illicit activities – as was the case during the conflict – which generate much more income than agricultural production and legal commerce.

In short, the presence of firearms owned by civilians continues being an obstacle to development in post-conflict situations because it does not allow rebuilding community reconciliation processes, expansion of local and national economies, and strengthening of political systems in the countries.

b. Achieve Universal Primary Education:

Schools are increasingly being threatened by firearms. The issue of young armed people attending classes is a matter of concern in public schools in Central America. In Guatemala, a teacher was killed by a student who had got a bad grade last year, and a 16-year old entered a private school to kill a peer of the same age in front of the class two weeks ago. In addition, parents and their children have been murdered at the entrance of different schools on several occasions during the past year. This leads to an increasing fear by teachers to perform their job and exercise authority, and schools are becoming unsafe places for students as well.

Within the context of societies where young people have little access to secondary education – which is crucial to reducing crime rates in the future – ^{xvii}, violence through firearms becomes a factor for absenteeism. In other cases, schools are the places where children first establish contact with gangs, and sooner or later this will cause them to abandon formal education.

In poor areas, it is much more difficult for children to attend school because of living in remote places, in many cases, or because they are needed at home to participate in agricultural production or other wage-earning work. Countries in post-conflict situations report high rates of child workers^{xviii}. Girls are forced to stay at home to help take care of younger siblings. The violence through firearms which surrounds schools is but another factor of risk and a deterrent to getting a primary education. According to data from Casa Alianza, an average of two children have died by firearms each day in the last 6 months.

Data provided by SIECA^{xix} for the region reflect that almost 38 million dollars worth of firearms were imported to Central America in 2001–2004. In Guatemala, the amount imported in 2003 equals the National University's budget for that same year; the amount allocated to secondary education by the Ministry of Education; and half the budget for universal primary care.

Statistics for importation of fire arms to the region. Value of importations in US Dollars					
Country	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
2002	4,938,286.00	2,196,754	2,021,500	1,016,275	1,796,794
2003	6,498,883.00	2,533,939	2,666,346	1,064,292	1,679,918
2004	4,669,553.00	2,048,650	nd.	1,383,980	1,32,197

c. **Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women:**

Of the 650 million small firearms existing worldwide, most are in the hands of men^{xx}, and 60% are owned by civilians^{xxi}. The probability of death as a result of an aggressive action with a firearm is 12 times higher than that of an aggressive action performed with any other type of weapon.

In South Africa^{xxii}, one woman dies every 18 hours because she is shot by her partner or ex partner. In the United States, if a firearm exists in a home the risk for a member of the family to be murdered increases 41%, but the risk increases 272% for women. In France and South Africa, one out of three women who are killed by their partners die as a result of the use of firearms. In the United States the ratio is two out of three women.

In view of this scenario, small firearms are a constant risk to women's equality and development. In a violent society that uses firearms, the number of deaths of women increases each year. In Central America, where no armed conflict persists, the number of women who are murdered is exceeding the number of victims killed during the conflict. Today women are murdered by civilians, and increasingly through the use of firearms. In addition, as a result of the situation of increasing violence women are fearing to leave home, thus reducing their level of participation and education.

Guatemala: Homicide Rate for Women /total homicides ^{xxiii}				
Year	Total	Men	Women	Women rate
2001	3,230	2,927	303	9.38
2002	3,631	3,314	317	8.73
2003	4,237	3,854	383	9.04
2004	3,614	3,083	531	14.69
TOTAL	14,712	13,178	1,534	10.43

**Homicide Rate for Women /100,000 Women
Country Comparison^{xxiv}**

Country	Rate
México, Country	3,3
México, City	7,5
Costa Rica	2,2
El Salvador	6,9
Guatemala	9,0
Guatemala City	30,0

The debates on the increasing association between the use of firearms and masculinity in the phenomena of youth gangs are widespread in the region. Young people have learned to associate the use of firearms with values of supremacy and identity. This makes them the main users of small firearms. Thus, violence is moving from the streets to the homes.

In addition to the vicious circle of insecurity and poverty, the post-conflict scenario raises another increasing association: Youth and firearms. Either in order to commit crimes or simply as a cultural reference, young people in the region are getting more and more armed but also, more and more of them are dying and causing the death of others.

- d. **Reduce Infant Mortality**
- e. **Improve Maternal Health;**
- f. **Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other Diseases:**

These three Goals refer to the possibility of prevention and basic health care for the most vulnerable populations and sectors.

In addition to the above described problems related to the effects of firearms on the possibility of access to remote places by State services and NGOs, the violence that has risen in some geographic areas – particularly in areas where organized crime exists – hinders health care service provision and decentralization of health care infrastructure, which affects mainly pregnant women and children.

Likewise, the possibility of including these areas in vaccination campaigns and primary health care provision is reduced. In addition, private enterprises are increasingly refusing to provide supplies and merchandise to remote health posts and drug stores due to the increasing insecurity on the roads. As a result, costs of medicaments and private medical services are increasing – that is, if medicaments and services are available.

Homicide has become the main cause of death in the three countries with the highest homicide rates. Furthermore, the number of people who are injured by firearms exceeds the number of people who are injured in an accident. Injuries by firearms are increasing each year at a rate that can be 33% higher than the rate for 2005, as has been reported in one of Guatemala's most important hospitals^{xxv}. The average cost of health care services for people injured by firearms in this hospital alone accounts for 1% of the total health budget for the entire country and the total annual operation costs of a hospital located in a peri-urban area. However, the cost of firearms that were imported to Guatemala in 2003 accounts for 18% of the total budget of the Ministry of Health.

Health services for people injured by firearms are causing a collapse of the health system, leaving health care services for common disease in second place. Given that injured patients need to be cared for immediately (an average of 33% of them die), no room is left for other patients who arrive at the emergency rooms in

a serious condition. According to the same data, 74% of the individuals injured by firearms are 11–30 years old.

Health care systems in societies with such a high impact of violence through firearms are in a continuous state of emergency. Prevention actions are reduced to mere desires, from a budgetary perspective. The Law for Prevention and Care of HIV/AIDS has been approved in Guatemala for 2006, and a budget of approximately US\$660,000 has been allocated to the relevant unit.

Firearms in the hands of civilians distort operations and goals of a society, creating a continuous state of emergency in the areas of security, health, or education. In addition, it diverts resources which are required for development and to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

g. Ensure Environmental Sustainability:

The absence of public policy with an emphasis on prevention is one of the problems which characterize post-conflict situations, where resources are continuously being allocated and efforts are made to solve emergencies. As a result, vulnerabilities in countries are deeper and any catastrophe can devastate entire regions and affect thousands of people.

While the State's actions are focused on repression – in matters of security and in emergencies regarding services – the vision of prevention is forsaken. Inequality and poverty worsen the vulnerability situation of communities, affecting the real possibility of achieving sustainable development. The most direct link between firearms and this Development Goal is also related to activities by illegal groups which move through great expanses of protected areas that are close to the borders.

On one hand, the presence of armed groups in areas which are destined as buffer zones to absorb the human impact on natural reserves hinders the movement of members of maintenance and environmental conservation units. On the other hand, activities of populations living in buffer zones are also altered by the presence of illicit trafficking moving along the border, because they fear to engage in productive activities or eco-tourism in those areas.

Likewise, in this environment of impunity, historical cultural monuments are damaged by predators and smugglers of antique objects who also use clandestine landing strips which are built. In addition, eco-tourism – one of the productive alternatives for the inhabitants of protected areas in order not to exert pressure on natural reserves – is negatively affected by insecurity. Nor can archaeological sites that are located within the protected areas be used as tourist attractions.

The existence of dangerous areas where local authorities have no access favors, in turn, another type of exploitation, storage, planting and processing of narcotics, with a negative impact on the environment and a reduction of the jungle. These areas can be subject to possible spraying by authorities, as part of the actions to combat drug trafficking, with the resulting impact on flora and fauna in the sprayed sites.

Environmental NGOs are not able to carry out their educational and awareness-raising activities with populations who live in the buffer zones due to the risk associated to movement in those areas. Recreational residences located close to protected areas are being abandoned for fear of the constant presence of criminal groups, to the detriment of local employment and commercial activities. As a result, populations are forced to engage in agricultural production and become a danger to environmental conservation. Finally, borders in these areas tend to have innumerable blind spots where arms, merchandise, drugs, and persons can be trafficked. In addition, due to the presence of armed individuals border authorities do not perform mandatory supervision tasks, and coordination with neighboring countries is impossible.

Governance and Arms

The close link between insecurity and poverty, and between governance and development, has been shown throughout this document. The misuse of firearms by civilians worsens the lack of governance in a country undergoing a transition process and turns into an obstacle for societies to achieve human security and ultimately, achieve sustainable development. Thus, in order to face the challenge of controlling arms, actions are required in two areas simultaneously: Supply and Demand.

1. Supply

Actions included in this area are the development of a regulatory framework and procedures. This means that States need to implement actions regarding the following aspects:

- Controlling production, storage, marking arms and ammunition, transparency and control of transfers, accountability of commerce, final user;
 - A transparent interaction with other States (regional and sub-regional international treaties, Behavior Codes for the transfer of arms). Regional and bilateral actions to control the smuggling of arms and ammunition;
 - Control and inventory of arsenals held by countries' security and defense forces;
 - Restriction and regulation of arms and ammunition held by civilians and commercialization of arms and ammunition (with a special emphasis on private security enterprises). Controlling import and export of arms and ammunition;
 - Reducing the number of arms in circulation;
 - Destruction of stored arms.
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2. Demand

Regardless of how much progress is made in terms of a regulatory framework and regulation of transfer and commercialization of arms, if no actions are taken with regard to demand the flow of arms can never be stopped^{xxvi}. Therefore, actions need to be taken regarding the following aspects:

- Motivation of individuals to acquire an arm: Personal security, crime, cultural and gender aspects, latent conflicts;
 - Means to acquire arms: Monetary resources, non-monetary resources, costs, cost/benefit for illegal possession of arms, difficult/easy access;
 - Actions starting at a local level. Actions will only be sustainable if communities are involved in preventive security and disarming programs as a component of this.
 - Promoting strategic alliances among civil society, local actors, local authorities, and national authorities;
 - Developing a legal system which responds promptly and effectively;
 - Guaranteeing citizen security with a democratic vision;
 - Committing to achievement of human security with a vision of prevention and a police force which serves in democracy;
 - Promoting a culture of peace, training and education to foster dialogue and transformation of conflicts;
 - Strengthening the social fabric;
 - Building a society with equality and justice.
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The Action Plan should:

- Consolidate actions focused on reduction and control of supply;
 - Emphasize actions to address the effects of the proliferation of arms in governance;
 - Recognize the importance of security (SSR) and its link to development;
 - Prioritize the adoption of mechanisms for conflict resolution and a culture of peace;
 - Strengthen actions oriented toward conflict resolution and a peaceful transformation of conflicts;
 - Expand to include actions oriented toward reducing the demand, recognizing especially that civil society participation is indispensable;
 - Take the local dimension into account as a starting point to strengthen the social fabric;
 - Establish monitoring mechanisms to advance in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This involves designing indicators which will enable comparisons between countries, evaluation, and information exchange.
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Notes

ⁱ “*International Action Network on Small Arms*”. IANSA. Constitution Document. May 1999. Political Framework. P.3 [Quote translated from Spanish.]

ⁱⁱ In Guatemala, the *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (Civil Patrols) which had been established by the Army had more than 800,000 members during the worst part of the conflict, out of a population of 8 million people.

ⁱⁱⁱ In Guatemala, ten years after demobilization former members of Civil Patrols have carried out several demonstrations to demand financial compensation. This pressure is added to the demands by victims of the armed conflict. A fund – managed by the Compensation Commission – has been established for victims of the conflict.

^{iv} Please refer to diverse publications by William Godnick and the REDCEPAZ regional diagnosis for more information.

^v The Esquipulas II Process was promoted during the second half of the 80s. The objective of this process was the "pacification" of Central America, based on a regional proposal developed by the actors in response to North American policy.

^{vi} The concept was first established in the *Tratado Marco de Seguridad Democrática* (Framework Treaty on Democratic Security) in Central America, signed by Presidents in December, 1995.

^{vii} The topic of the limit between the development agenda and security is an ongoing debate. However, apparently this depends on classifying phenomena as threats or risks in a traditional conception of security. Therefore, problems which could be solved based on economic, employment, or education policy end up transforming into movements which threaten the security of the State.

^{viii} The average duration of an administration period for a political party is 4 years.

^{ix} Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (*Instituto Latinoamericano de Naciones Unidas para la Prevención del Delito*)

^x According to the World Bank, homicide rates in Latin America are the highest worldwide. From the early 80s to the mid-90s, rates for intentional homicide have increased 50 percent in Latin America. The main victims of this type of homicide are young men, 69% of whom are 15-19 years old.

^{xi} REDCEPAZ . *The problem of illegal arms in Central America*, IEPADES, Guatemala, marzo 2006, p.12

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Ibid p 15

^{xv} Estimates made with information from the police bodies in Central America. Some of the reference information which allows to make these projections is the number of illegal arms that are confiscated

^{xvi} Londoño, Gaviria y Guerrero. *Asalto al Desarrollo: violencia en América Latina*. BID, Washington, 2000

^{xvii} According to the UNDP 1999 Human Development Report, only 20% of the young population attends middle school in Guatemala.

^{xviii} According to Casa Alianza in Guatemala, more than 2.5 million children works under unsuitable conditions.

^{xix} Sistema de Integración en Centroamérica

^{xx} In Guatemala, 1% of the firearms owned by civilians belongs to women.

^{xxi} *Small Arms Survey 2002: Counting the Human Cost*. Oxford University Press, 2002

^{xxii} For more information see *The impact of guns on women's lives*. AI, IANSA and OXFAM. www.controlarms.org

^{xxiii} de León-Escribano, Carmen Rosa. *Guatemala: análisis sobre estadísticas de muertes violentas de mujeres*. Guatemala, junio de 2005. p. 4

^{xxiv} Ibid. P.5. This facts are from diverse newspapers and from studies by Fundación Género y Sociedad from Costa Rica.

^{xxv} Dr. Julio Figueroa's Conference in May 2006. from San Juan de Dios Hospital in Guatemala City.

^{xxvi} For further information: *Demanding Attention: Addressing the Dynamics of Small Arms Demand* by David Atwood, Anne-Kathrin Glatz y Robbert Muggah. Small Arms Survey, Occasional Paper 18, January 2006. www.smallarmssurvey.org
