

Chapter 2

The human cost



Bacary Biaye in a small ward at the Regional Hospital in Ziguinchor, Casamance, Senegal. He was shot in July 1999 during a rebel attack on a bus, and has lost the use of his legs.

2: The human cost of arms abuse

‘How loud do you expect us to yell and cry out? How much pain and suffering do you think we’re able to bear? How many heads and arms will be cut off by rockets before someone can give us a listening ear?’

Emily Baker, whose husband was killed in fighting in Liberia, 2003⁵⁸

The real cost of arms is much too high.

- ▶ In our work, Amnesty International and Oxfam are witnesses to the use of arms to commit gross abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law – whether in conflict, crime, law enforcement, state repression, or violence in the home.
- ▶ The misuse of arms jeopardises people’s fundamental rights, including the right to life.
- ▶ The indirect effects, often overlooked, are huge. Arms are misused to deny people access to land, markets, schools, and hospitals, and thus contribute to increases in malnutrition and disease.
- ▶ In the long term, these effects increase poverty and derail development.

Arms are one key factor in facilitating, prolonging, and intensifying conflict and armed violence. Arms are used arbitrarily and indiscriminately to kill or injure, to threaten people and drive them from their homes; the flow of arms enables and sustains conflicts in which civilian casualties mount. At a deeper level, the misuse of arms may obstruct the possibilities for development and interfere with people’s rights to a decent livelihood, health services, and education.

More than 500,000 civilians are estimated to die each year on average from the misuse of conventional arms: one person every minute.⁵⁹

The right to life

In the time taken to read this page, one more person will most likely be killed somewhere in the world, and at least two more will have been seriously injured by the use of arms.

Armed conflict: the easy availability of arms tends to increase the incidence of armed violence, prolong wars once they break out, and enable grave and widespread abuses of human rights.⁶⁰ In some situations, the escalating supply of arms acts as a *trigger* for conflict. For example, arms shipments to Rwanda, principally from China, France, South Africa, and Egypt, in the tense months preceding the civil war in Rwanda in 1994, are widely considered to have encouraged and facilitated the eventual genocide, even though most atrocities were committed by people wielding agricultural tools.⁶¹ The importance of arms is greatest as *fuel* to sustain long-term conflict, responsible not so much for the initiation of wars, but for their continuation. Armed conflicts cannot be sustained without the supply of arms or, where they are already abundant, without ammunition.⁶² For example, attack

helicopters provided by German and Belgian arms brokers were used in 1997 by government forces to strafe the residential areas of Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, killing thousands of civilians.⁶⁴

After one bombing raid by the US-led Coalition in Iraq using cluster bombs at al-Hilla, more than 200 people were wounded, about 80 per cent of whom were civilians. One eyewitness described how ‘the wounds were vicious and deep, a rash of scarlet spots on the back and thighs or face, the shards of shrapnel from the cluster bombs buried an inch or more in the flesh... Patients reported that explosives fell “like grapes” from the sky’.⁶⁵

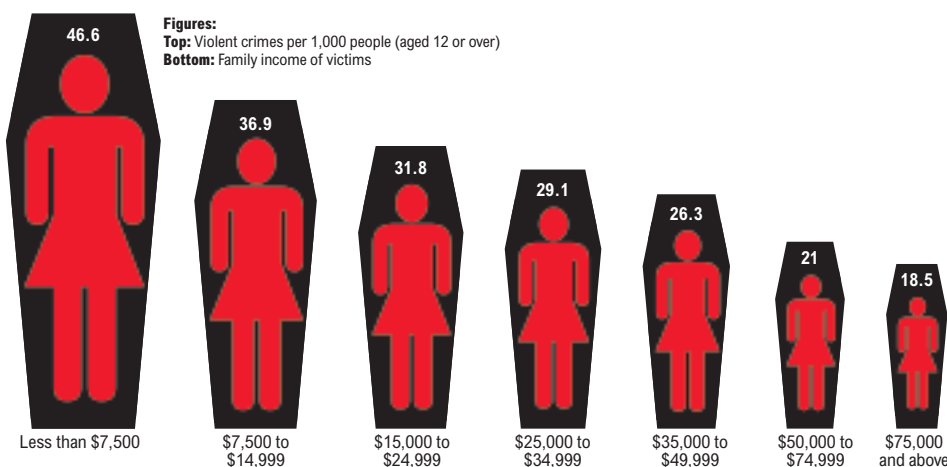
Beyond armed conflicts: in crime-ridden societies, the easy availability of arms is linked to the level of armed violence.⁶⁶ While there is debate over the best way of ameliorating the culture of violence that is often prevalent in such societies, this basic concern cannot be ignored. Studies from developed countries (data are rarely available elsewhere) consistently show a clear correlation between household gun ownership and death rates. This link is most clearly seen in the case of suicides and accidental deaths, and especially among young people.⁶⁷ Sometimes it is police and other law-enforcement officials who commit armed crime and violate human rights. In Brazil, police in many areas have been linked to ‘death squads’ responsible for hundreds of killings, including those of children, which have long gone unpunished. Federal investigations in 2002 indicated that all branches of the *Espírito Santo* state authorities had been infiltrated by organised criminals, with consequent increases in systematic violations of human rights, including summary executions by police.⁶⁸

‘I saw bodies on the ground as I ran with my children. The [helicopter] gunships were shooting at us, so I could not stop to see if they were alive. The gunships also fired rockets that set the village on fire.’

Yak Gatdet Kok, from Nhialdiu in southern Sudan, 2001⁶⁵

Poor people are more likely than rich people to fall victim to violent crime

Source: US National Criminal Victimization Survey, 2001.



‘The bombing was very severe. They mainly hit military targets, but the force of the explosions was so intense. It was terrible for children and people with heart problems. My children used to rush to me, I could feel their hearts pounding like a little bird in your hand.’

Ghulam Rassoul, a driver in Herat, Afghanistan, 2002⁶⁹

'I was 14 years old when I started working with guns. [The drug faction] gave me my first weapon. Left it with me to do the security... it is from them, but it's mine to carry.'

A boy in the drug trade [rank of *soldado*, soldier] in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, 2002⁷⁷

Widespread organised violence can cost as many lives as overt armed conflict. In the last 14 years, almost 4,000 people under the age of 18 were killed by firearms in Rio state.⁷⁸

The number of deaths from small arms varies hugely between different countries, from 0.01 deaths per 100,000 people in Hong Kong, to 30 per 100,000 in El Salvador, to 55 per 100,000 in Colombia. Risks also vary within countries: the average firearm-homicide rate in Kenya as a whole, for example, is 10–15 per 100,000 people, whereas in the north-east and north-west of the country, where arms are widely available, the rate climbs to 580 per 100,000.⁷⁰ Such statistics cannot convey the reality of the human suffering caused by these weapons.

- ▶ It is men, especially young men, who are the most common perpetrators and the most common victims of gun violence, in times of both war and 'peace'. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, young men are 24 times more likely than women to be killed by firearms; in Colombia they are 14 times more likely to die of gunshot wounds.⁷¹
- ▶ Nevertheless, women have been killed and injured in great numbers by shooting and bombing in armed conflict. Women and girls made up a high proportion of the victims when armed forces drove hundreds of thousands of refugees from camps in the Great Lakes Region in 1996 and deliberately executed refugees en masse.⁷²
- ▶ The young are not spared. Children have become targets in drug wars, in political and gang-related killing, in civil and international wars, and as victims of police brutality. In Honduras, at least 1,817 street children have been killed over the last five years.⁷³ Interviews with a group of Croatian refugee children in 1992 revealed that 85 per cent had experienced shooting, 67 per cent shelling, and 24 per cent bombing.⁷⁴
- ▶ Nor are older people spared. In Kosovo from February 1998 to June 1999, the mortality rate from armed violence for men aged 50 or over was nearly 10 times that of women from the same age group, and more than three times that of men of military age (15–49 years), which suggests that Serb forces may have been specifically targeting the traditional heads of households in order to weaken the social and cultural integrity of local society.⁷⁵

The death and injury of such large numbers of people, many young, have profound consequences for development: reducing the number of people entering the work force, diverting family and social resources into the care of those disabled by gun violence, and forcing governments to redirect funding from social services to public security.⁷⁶

Violations of civil and political rights

Arms are frequently used for direct violations of the rights to life and to physical and mental integrity, but they are also the means through which coercion can be brought to bear to perpetrate any number of other abuses. The threatening use of arms by security forces, armed groups, or others in positions of authority places those subject to their control in a very vulnerable position, often literally at their mercy.

Torture and arbitrary arrests

Violations take place while people are detained, either in police stations, detention centres, or prisons. The statistics are shocking. Between 1997 and 2000, Amnesty International received reports of torture or ill-treatment by state officials in more than 150 countries. In more than 70, the offences were widespread or persistent. In more than 80 countries, people reportedly died as a result of their treatment at the hands of those in authority. The evidence strongly suggests that most of the victims were people suspected or convicted of criminal offences. Most of the torturers were police officers who used armed threats and violence to subdue their victims.⁸⁰

Sometimes torturers use weapons that are supposed to be ‘safer’ than traditional firearms: ‘We saw them shock the [Haitian] detainee on his body with an electric shield, also with an electric gun. ...The Haitian detainee was shocked about three times. While being shocked, the Haitian detainee was handcuffed, his hands to his legs, lying on his side on the floor.’ This testimony was one of many disturbing allegations of torture or ill-treatment made by people detained by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service and held at the Jackson County Correctional Facility, Florida between August 1997 and July 1998.⁸¹

Sexual violence

Armed sexual violence is horrifically widespread in heavily armed environments. Weapons can be used to facilitate systematic rape – a war crime, used to hasten the expulsion of national groups by degrading women and spreading terror, fear, and humiliation. Sexual violence against men may also be significant, but few data on this type of abuse have so far been collated, and it is believed that most cases are not reported.

Women and girls are raped at gunpoint while away from home collecting firewood and water, or undertaking other daily tasks; they are also vulnerable in jail or refugee

‘They started beating me, and terrorising me with a Kalashnikov. They put a tyre around my neck and told me they would burn me if I did not confess. I confessed, but it wasn’t true.’

Samuel Nsengiyumva, aged 14, arrested in Burundi and accused of stealing a soldier’s gun⁷⁹

'The Renamo were showing us guns so that if we don't do these things – sleep with them and cook for them – they will kill us.'

A Mozambican refugee⁸²

camp, with no place to hide. At least 15,700 women and girls in Rwanda and 25,000 in Croatia and Bosnia are reported to have been raped at times of armed conflict; the actual figures may be much higher.⁸³ This can have implications for HIV/AIDS infection: soldiers often have a much higher infection rate than the civilian population, and forced sex is more likely to lead to transmission.⁸⁴

Violence in the home, sometimes armed, by intimate partners and friends increases during conflict, as sanctions against men's violence break down, and women's social and economic vulnerability increases.⁸⁵ Threatening behaviours are astonishingly similar across cultures: they include shooting the family dog as a warning, or getting out a gun and cleaning it during an argument.⁸⁶ Forty per cent of women contacting the SOS Hotline in Belgrade during the war in the former Yugoslavia said they had been threatened with weapons, and a 10-month study in Northern Ireland showed that the increased availability of guns meant that more dangerous forms of violence were used against women in the home.⁸⁷

In non-conflict situations, a number of studies have suggested that the risk of being murdered by an intimate partner increases with the availability of firearms.⁸⁸

Where they are readily available, firearms are the weapons of choice when men kill their partners. In the USA, 51 per cent of female murder victims are shot, according to the Violence Policy Center in 1999. Consistent with other international studies, research by the Gun Control Alliance in South Africa in 1999 suggests that more women are shot at home in acts of domestic violence than are shot by strangers on the streets or by intruders.

The psychological impact

Physical injuries command most attention, yet the psychological burden of armed attack is severe and enduring, though frequently overlooked. Psychiatrists in Croatia working with women who have been raped, bereaved, or displaced, believe that it will take two to three generations before the psychological effects of the war pass.⁸⁹ Four out of five women raped in 1994 in Rwanda continue to suffer psychological trauma.⁹¹

Ex-combatants may display panic attacks and aggressive behaviour,⁹² as well as despair and helplessness as a result of their inability to provide for and protect their families. Children have their own particular psychological burdens, which are often barely addressed.⁹³ A UNICEF-funded survey found that 75 per cent of the children in the Occupied Territories were suffering emotional problems from their experience of the conflict, with repeated exposure to the sound of shelling and shooting cited as the major cause of psychological damage.⁹⁴

'Some of the men who come back from the front... abuse women, beat their children, sleep with machine guns under their pillows, rape their wives while they are sleeping, destroy the furniture, scream, swear, spit, accuse.'

A woman in Belgrade, Serbia, one of the founders of the SOS Hotline for women, 1992⁸⁹

Forced to flee

At the end of 2002, around 22 million people across the world were internally displaced. About 13 million were refugees and asylum-seekers seeking protection outside their own countries.⁹⁶ Most of the world's displaced population consists of women and children.⁹⁷ Estimates show that 4.3 million people were newly uprooted in 2002, the majority in Africa.⁹⁸ In Sudan, more than four million people are displaced; 85 per cent of the inhabitants of southern Sudan are thought to have been displaced at least once in the last 15 years.⁹⁹ In Colombia, more than 250,000 people have been displaced each year for the last five years – in 2002, the figure was estimated to be 350,000.¹⁰⁰

In other places, armed groups and governments put limits on people's movement: checkpoints prevent free passage, borders are closed, passes are required, civilians are 'advised' when to travel. These restrictions bar access to food, work, basic commerce, education, and medical attention. The right to move freely is particularly critical for pregnant women, and sick and injured people.

Those who find themselves in refugee camps may not see an end to fear and armed violence, because many camps have become increasingly militarised. They are sometimes used as hubs for arms trafficking (for example, Dadaab camp in north-eastern Kenya, used as a reception point for arms arriving from Somalia); or they are used as a source of recruitment for rebel forces (for example, camps in West and Central Africa). Too often, governments and the international community have failed to minimise this risk by providing adequate protection for refugees.

In mid-2000, Guinea hosted some 350,000 Sierra Leonean and 150,000 Liberian refugees who had fled the conflicts in their respective countries. From September 2000, however, with a total breakdown of security along the three borders, Guinea changed from a place of refuge to a place of violence. According to Amnesty International, refugee camps throughout the country were attacked by armed political groups, and countless refugees were killed, beaten, raped, tortured, and abducted as they fled from one camp to another, trying to stay ahead of the violence. Others were arrested, tortured or killed by the security forces. As they travelled, they faced military or civilian checkpoints and roadblocks, where they were humiliated, threatened, and forced to pay bribes or hand over food and other possessions. Refugees fleeing on foot from one camp to another had to pass so many checkpoints that they literally had no money or possessions left. In at least one incident, helicopter gunships flew low over a refugee camp and launched artillery close to the camp, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries, in attacks which appeared to be an attempt to frighten the refugees into leaving.¹⁰¹

'When the planes first started to fly over us, we thought it was just a display. But then they started dropping bombs near us. We were surprised and we were scared. Everyone ran for their lives. All their property, whatever they owned, was left behind. We didn't know where some family members were. We found each other at this evacuation centre.'

Male resident of an evacuation centre in Pagalungan, Mindanao, Philippines⁹⁵

'In October 2000, helicopter gunships flew very low over Kalia camp, to frighten us. They were launching artillery but not firing at people. Three pregnant women aborted and one of the women and a child died... We had run away from war and in a place of refuge there was war also.'

Sierra Leone refugee in camp in Forécariah region, Guinea¹⁰²

'I was taken in 1995, when I was 10... We were taken to Sudan for training, and after two or three months I was given a gun. That's where I learned to use it... I was afraid to try to escape, in case they caught me and killed me... I had to kill other children, or they would have killed me.'

Jack (not his real name), abducted by Lord's Resistance Army rebels in Uganda, 2000¹⁰⁵

One neglected reality is the connection between arms sales and the displacement of thousands of people as a consequence of human rights abuses. Governments in wealthier countries may be willing to sell arms to countries committing gross violations of human rights, yet they rarely welcome asylum-seekers from those same countries. In the European Union (EU), more than one million asylum applications were lodged between 2000 and 2002; the highest number came from Iraq, followed by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Turkey.¹⁰³ Armed forces in all these countries received arms from EU states during the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰⁴

Abduction and hostage-taking

Men, women, and children are abducted at gunpoint and forced to fight or work for their abductors. In Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army has abducted more than 20,000 children since 1986; children make up a very high proportion of LRA soldiers. Those caught trying to escape are summarily executed, as a warning to others.¹⁰⁶ Between 10,000 and 17,000 women and children have been abducted from southern Sudan; as recently as early 2003, government and allied militia abducted civilian men and boys for military purposes, while women and children were taken to government-controlled towns in the oilfields around Bentiu, where the women were forced to provide manual labour and sexual services.¹⁰⁷

Civilians are also taken hostage and held for ransom by armed forces. Guerrilla groups and paramilitaries kidnapped more than 1,400 people during 2002 in Colombia.¹⁰⁸

'Disappearances'

Small arms are used in thousands of 'disappearances' all over the world. People are captured by government forces or their paramilitary allies, who then deny all knowledge of the detainees. Most of them are feared dead, the victims of extra-judicial executions. Their families face the often prolonged agony of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones.

The world has recently seen evidence of the horrific scale of such abuses in Iraq. In Chechnya, it was reckoned that at least 540 Chechens had gone missing without trace since the beginning of the second conflict in 1999 until 2001;¹⁰⁹ the fate and whereabouts of approximately 20,000 people in the former Yugoslavia remain unknown to this day.¹¹⁰

Silencing opposition

Political activists, journalists, trade unionists, and peaceful demonstrators are frequently attacked by government or other armed forces seeking to deprive them of their freedom of expression and association. Trade unionists in Colombia have been threatened, attacked, and assassinated, and have ‘disappeared’. Most of those responsible for these abuses have not been punished. Between 1 January and 15 October 2002, 118 trade unionists were killed.¹¹¹ Arms are also used by government forces, their proxies, or other political groups to suppress pressure for democratic change; they thus do particular harm to democracy and good governance. In 2002, violence marred the period leading to the Zimbabwean local elections in September;¹¹² and approximately 732 people were killed in Kashmir from the announcement of the polls to their close in October.¹¹³

Violations of social and economic rights

International law recognises that states share responsibilities for the protection and fulfilment of basic economic and social rights. Where states transfer weapons to countries in the knowledge that doing so is likely to set back efforts to meet the needs for health care, education, housing, or a basic standard of living – all of which are fundamental human rights – they may contribute to the continuing denial of these rights.

Denial of aid

Armed violence, actual and threatened, prevents aid reaching those who desperately need it. Warring parties may purposely block humanitarian assistance, using access to food and medical supplies as a military tactic. Sometimes aid workers, their convoys, their offices, and their programmes are specifically targeted. One hundred and eighty civilian aid workers were killed in acts of violence between 1997 and 2001, the greatest proportion of whom died as a result of ambushes of vehicles, carried out by bandits or rebel groups.¹¹⁶ One of the key responses to this type of danger is to suspend both humanitarian and development programmes and withdraw aid workers, thus denying the delivery of aid to needy communities.

In the year 2001–2, Oxfam GB temporarily suspended emergency assistance programmes in nine countries, withdrew key management staff twice, had staff hospitalised twice, and completely closed one programme, in addition to taking many other security precautions. The suspension, even if temporary, of a relief

‘Life has changed completely due to the war. Our schools have been closed. Now the closest school is about 12 miles away. As a result, many have dropped out of school. Now we do not do our harvesting and other cultivation work without consulting the police. In the past we had cultivators’ meetings to decide on these matters, now we have meetings with the police!’

Villager from Welikanda, Sri Lanka, 1998¹¹⁴

Indonesia, the second highest recipient of net overseas aid, spends almost the same sum of money on its military forces as it receives in aid.¹¹⁵

‘To survive, I grow cabbages and leeks and sell them in the market... Often there’s a military alert or a gunshot, and the market is empty in minutes. Lots of my cabbages are stolen in my field – nobody can sleep in his fields every night.’

Dikosi, an agricultural engineer in Dele, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2000¹¹⁸

programme delivering food, water, sanitation, or basic health products has obvious and direct effects. Equally important is the loss of protection: as aid agencies withdraw, both civilians and military forces know that witnesses from the international community have left, no longer able to testify to any violations of international human rights or humanitarian law.

Armed violence hinders the arrival of aid and affects mechanisms for the provision of aid. In the mid-1980s a disastrous drought struck much of Africa, and on-going wars in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan transformed the drought into a famine that claimed more than one million lives. Bomb damage to relief supply stores of the World Food Program and ICRC compounded the difficulty of delivering food to Afghanistan in late 2001.¹¹⁷

Denial of livelihoods

The means to make a living and provide for a family are affected as armed groups target communities for supplies, or prevent people from engaging in commerce. With assets depleted, people are less and less able to cope with external shocks; repeated disruption poses a severe threat to secure supplies of food. Income falls to such a level that people have to reduce the number of meals they eat, and sell their assets to survive.

- ▶ In Nicaragua, the army distributed AK-47s to coffee farmers for their own protection, but many were stolen and used against the farmers whom they were supposed to protect. Coffee growers in Matagalpa reported a 10.5 per cent rise in production costs in 1999, owing to the additional security measures required to combat this and other armed violence.¹¹⁹
- ▶ In western Tanzania, thieves used arms from refugee camps to rob Lake Victoria fishermen of their fish, money, and nets. Without the means to make a living, the fishermen pour agrochemicals into the lake to kill the fish, which then float to the surface, where they can be collected and sold at local markets. This is causing environmental pollution, health problems, and spiralling poverty among the fishing communities.¹²⁰

One third of countries spend more on the military than they do on health-care services.¹²¹

Denial of health care

Armed insecurity is a hazard to health. Acute health problems cannot be treated if people are denied access to health services. Gunshot wounds were found to be the leading cause of injuries and deaths from 1994 to 1999 in Gulu, Uganda, yet only 13 per cent of those injured were able to reach a health-care facility within one hour, and only 40 per cent in six hours. The majority of people with severe injuries will not survive if they do not obtain treatment within a couple of hours.¹²³ Maternal and child mortality – key indicators for the Millennium Development Goals – increase markedly in contexts of armed violence. When 200 troops passed through Boga district of the DRC, staff and two women awaiting caesarian-section operations fled the hospital. Staff later heard that they had both died at home in agonising labour.¹²⁴

The standard of care from health services declines during outbreaks of fighting and conflict. Health facilities are targeted; equipment is destroyed or looted, as in Iraq in early 2003, when hospital ambulances in Mosul were stolen at gunpoint.¹²⁵ The number of qualified staff declines as they flee the country, as in Bosnia, or are killed and injured, as in Rwanda. A high incidence of firearm injuries requiring hospital treatment also produces competition for resources. Routine health work suffers as resources are focused on those with more urgent weapons-related injuries and allocated to hospitals nearer the front line,¹²⁶ or even to services within the same hospital.¹²⁷

Communicable diseases that can be controlled relatively successfully in peace time become major killers, because vaccination programmes are impossible during armed conflict, and the greater movement of people provides opportunities for infection. Since war broke out in 1998, there has been a sharp increase in diseases such as cholera, measles, polio, plague, and meningitis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia, rates of tuberculosis increased by half, and outbreaks of hepatitis A were reported in Bosnia.¹²⁸

Denial of education

Conflict and armed crime hamper education. Schools are closed in response to danger, damage, and lack of teachers; sometimes schools are appropriated for other purposes, such as housing for displaced people. In larger Brazilian cities, it is not uncommon for classes to be interrupted or schools closed because of gunfire during territorial battles between rival drug gangs or clashes with police.¹²⁹ In Djugu, north-eastern DRC, armed disputes resulted in the destruction of 211 out of a total of 228 educational facilities, and more than 60 per cent of students and teachers

‘There are incidents like when the health centre was in the middle of crossfire between gangs. Or like once, when gangs posted snipers in key places who shot at people arriving or leaving the health centres. All this makes our staff afraid; on one occasion the doctor’s car was shot at. Another time, the staff had to remain inside due to the shootings outside.’

A health worker in Medellín, Colombia, 2001¹²²

withdrew from school.¹³⁰ More than half of school-age children in Brazil reported that it was easy to obtain firearms near the school, and of these, about 70 per cent said that guns were used in violent incidents at school.¹³¹

Development derailed

An average of US\$22bn a year is spent on arms by countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America – a sum that would otherwise enable those countries to be on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education as well as targets for reducing infant and maternal mortality.¹³²

Weapons in the wrong hands have acute, immediate impacts on personal, economic, social, civil, and political rights, which translate into longer-term effects that prevent development. Development means giving people choices, through building their capacities and creating an environment for them to develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives; but this cannot happen when people live in fear of the misuse of arms, whether by state or non-state actors. Human development depends on peace and personal security, and thus sustainable development is a victim of insecurity. Poor development indicators go hand in hand with insecurity and conflict.

The Millennium Development Goals¹³⁴ grew out of the Millennium Summit in September 2000, when UN member states reaffirmed their commitment to working towards a world in which sustaining development and eliminating poverty would have the highest priority. They focus the efforts of the world community on achieving significant, measurable improvements in people’s lives. Yet for countries caught in the cycle of poverty and conflict, they seem completely out of reach.

Countries experiencing civil war 1997-2001

‘Small arms are destroying our lives and livelihoods, and they are serving no good. Poverty levels here are the highest in the country, and the infiltration is worsening our poverty. Without arms we would be very happy – just left with our spears to look after our animals.’

Hassan Odha, Community Development Programme Officer, Northern Kenya, 2002¹³³



56% of low-development countries



30% of medium-development countries



2% of high-development countries

The development of countries is defined here by the UN Human Development Index which is a composite measure, incorporating indicators relating to income, education, and life expectancy.¹³⁵

A vicious circle



*Development and Peace, Paul Collier in *Global Future*, First Quarter 2003 **The global menace of local strife, *The Economist*, 24 May 2003

Pakistan's total defence expenditures consume one third of its gross domestic product. With the servicing of debt on loans to finance foreign arms purchases, this figure rises to 50 per cent.¹³⁶

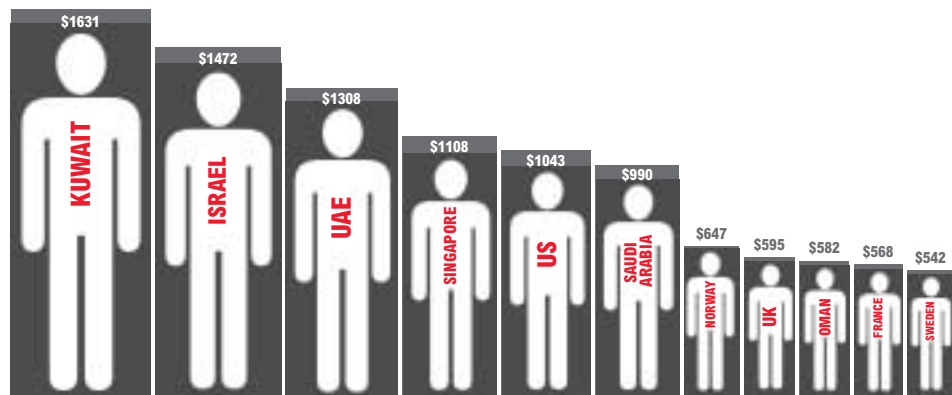
Opportunity costs of military spending

While most people would accept that some military spending is inevitable, it must be acknowledged that it competes with many aspects of civilian spending – on infrastructure, education, health care, environmental protection, the police, and so on. In developing economies, defence spending has a negative impact on the rate of economic growth.¹³⁷ In more advanced economies, there is no consensus that increased military expenditure is good for the economy;¹³⁸ some economists believe that reductions in military spending can improve economic performance, particularly when the savings are reallocated.¹³⁹

After conflict, governments tend to keep military spending high, to guard against future insurgency. Military spending consumes on average 2.8 per cent of governments' budgets before conflict, 5 per cent during conflict, and 4.5 per cent in the first decade of peace after civil war. Yet this expenditure is mortgaging a country's development: research shows that money could often be better spent on health care and education, signalling the government's intentions for peace and encouraging private investment.¹⁴⁰

While there are, of course, non-economic reasons for defence spending, and real threats that defence expenditure is intended to confront, there are too many cases in which money has been spent neither for legitimate reasons nor for purposes of defence.

- ▶ South Africa agreed in 1999 to purchase armaments worth US\$ 6bn, including frigates, submarines, aircraft, and helicopters. The controversial deal has been the subject of prolonged parliamentary scrutiny and other official inquiries, as well as legal action by a non-government organisation (NGO) to challenge the legality of the deal under the South African constitution.¹⁴² Six billion dollars would purchase treatment with combination therapy for all five million AIDS sufferers for two years.¹⁴³



Countries which spent the most on arms per head of population

Source: Data from the Human Development Report, 2002.

- ▶ Tanzania spent US\$ 40m on a joint civil-military air traffic control system in 2001/2. According to experts, this system was overpriced and inappropriate for its use,¹⁴⁴ and an unsuitable use of money in a country in which 46 per cent of the population are undernourished, and where US\$ 40m could have provided basic health care for 3.5 million people.

Economic and infrastructural losses

Economic gains are lost as countries seriously affected by armed violence slide into instability. Trade and production are disrupted, tourists stay away, and state management of infrastructure and national resources may be disrupted. A detailed study estimated the cost of the war in Sri Lanka up to 1998 at a staggering US\$ 20.8 billion – of which 23 per cent was war-related expenditure, 9 per cent related to damages, and 67 per cent stemmed from loss of output.¹⁴⁶ In Africa, the economic losses due to wars are estimated to be US\$ 15 bn per year.¹⁴⁷

- ▶ Armed violence prompts skilled staff and educated people to flee, and financial investment to be withdrawn, depressing economic activity, with particularly onerous impacts upon the landless and urban poor.¹⁴⁸
- ▶ Infrastructure is hard hit. During the 1991 Gulf War, bombs targeted installations used for civilian as well as military purposes, including the electrical supply that was critical for operating Iraq's water and sanitation systems.¹⁴⁹
- ▶ Foreign direct investment is reduced, because violent conflict is not something that most investors are willing to tolerate. In Mozambique, foreign direct investment amounted to US\$ 12m per year during the war and US\$ 443m per year immediately after it.
- ▶ The black market thrives, to the detriment of the national economy. A study links the collapse of the Thai Baht in the late 1990s to inflows of illegal profits from weapons merchants who used the stock and property markets to launder their proceeds.¹⁵⁰

The excessive diversion of resources – to fund arms purchases and to mitigate the problems caused directly by armed violence – reduces the ability of countries to promote development and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Nearly half of the countries with the highest defence burden have low indicators of human development. Angola and Eritrea spend more than 20 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on the military.¹⁴¹

Expenditures on health services to deal with the effects of violence amounted to 1.3 per cent of the gross domestic product in Mexico, 1.9 per cent in Brazil, 4.3 per cent in El Salvador, and 5 per cent in Colombia.¹⁴⁵