



# INTRODUCTION

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## **Overview of the research project**

In 2001, Gun Free South Africa (GFSA), in collaboration with the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), initiated a research project on small arms and light weapons in southern Africa. The objective of this project was to examine the trade, use and control of small arms and light weapons for the period 1994-2003. Research was undertaken in the following nine countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe by in-country researchers.

The rationale for the project was that only through a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the trade, use and control of small arms and light weapons can effective and sustainable strategies be identified for constructively managing the proliferation and limiting the misuse of small arms and light weapons in southern Africa.

The research sought to determine:

- The size and nature of state-held and civilian-owned legal small arms stockpiles.
- The source of illegal small arms and light weapons, and in particular, the nature and extent of the loss and theft of legal state-held and civilian small arms and light weapons.
- The factors which influence the demand for legal civilian firearms.

- The legal small arms and light weapons industry.
- The human impact of small arms and light weapons, as well as the nature and extent of firearm-related crime.
- Small arms and light weapons controls (legislation, policy and regulations), and the commitment of governments to international small arms and light weapons agreements, such as the Southern African Development Community's Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials.

Individuals from the following organisations conducted research and compiled chapters in this monograph: Centre for Strategic Studies (Botswana); Transformation Resource Centre (Lesotho); Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (Malawi); Institute for Public Policy Research (Namibia); Co-ordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (Swaziland); International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (Zambia); Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (Zimbabwe). In Mozambique, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) had already initiated a research project which sought to collect similar data to this project. In order to avoid duplication of activities, ISS researcher, Ana Leão undertook research for this project as well. She worked closely with Mozambican organisations, Tools for Arms and Propaz. In South Africa, the research was undertaken by staff of CCR and contracted researchers.

### ***Terminology***

The definitions of firearms, light weapons and small arms used in this monograph are similar to those used in the Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials in the Southern African Development Community Region (referred to throughout this report as the SADC Protocol). The SADC Protocol defines firearms, small arms and light weapons as follows:

“Light weapons” include the following portable weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a crew: heavy machine guns, automatic canons, howitzers, mortars of less than 100mm calibre, grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons and launchers, recoilless guns, shoulder fired rockets, anti-aircraft weapons and launchers and air defence weapons.

“Small arms” include light machine guns, sub-machine guns, including machine pistols, fully automatic rifles and assault rifles and semi-automatic rifles.<sup>1</sup>

A “firearm” is any portable lethal weapon that expels, or is designed to expel, a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of burning propellant. Firearm is a term that can be used to describe both a small arm and light weapon.

### ***Overview of literature***

In the ten years leading up to 2004, much has been written on small arms and light weapons in southern Africa, containing both qualitative and quantitative data. These studies and analyses have been published by South African NGOs and research institutes such as the Institute for Security Studies, the South African Institute of International Affairs, Gun Free South Africa, and more recently, SaferAfrica.<sup>2</sup>

The pioneering research and writing on small arms in the mid-1990s was predominantly conceptual in nature, seeking to give readers a framework for understanding the situation (Cock (1995); Smith, Batchelor and Potgieter (1996); and Smith and Vines (1997)). There were also a number of ground-breaking investigative reports by international human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (1994, 1995 and 1999), which provided evidence of small arms smuggling.

More recent studies of small arms in the region have been country-specific, with South Africa being a main focus. The most insightful publications include Chetty (2000), which provided a variety of official data on small arms related crime in South Africa, as well as Hennop, Jefferson and McLean (2001). The research by Minnaar (2003) focuses on the illegal trafficking in small arms through South Africa's borders and ports of entry.

Research has been done on bilateral small arms initiatives between southern African states. Operations Rachel, the joint weapons collection and destruction initiatives between the police forces of South Africa and Mozambique, has been a popular topic of study (Chachiuva (1999) and Hennop (2003)). Meek and Stott (2003) provide a comprehensive

description and analysis of arms destruction programmes for state-owned redundant or confiscated weapons in Lesotho and South Africa.

A handful of southern African studies focused on small arms-related legislation, such as Mckenzie (1999) and SaferWorld/SaferAfrica (2003). By the end of 2003 only Oosthysen (1996) had undertaken a regional study of small arms in southern Africa, but he had limited access to reliable information and did not provide a comparative analysis across countries. The study by Nkiwane, Chachiua and Meek (1999) introduced useful information on small arms flows in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland, and the edited volume by Gamba (2000) considered broad small arms trends in southern Africa, with a South African bias.

### ***Building a southern African small arms and light weapons network***

A secondary objective of this project was to establish a southern African network of civil society organisations in the area of small arms and light weapons, in which the members could develop their knowledge and expertise of small arms and light weapons issues in their own countries. This process was initiated through extensive consultation in the various countries with members of civil society and government on small arms and light weapons issues. Following this process, civil society organisations were contracted to undertake research (the names of which are mentioned in the section above). GFSA and CCR remained in regular contact with these organisations and communication between organisations was encouraged through the establishment of a specific email distribution system.

In South Africa there are a number of organisations which have conducted research and/or undertake advocacy work on small arms and light weapons issues. As a direct result of this research project, a South African small arms and light weapons roundtable, which meets on a quarterly basis to share information and ideas about small arms issues, was established in late-2002. The following organisations are regular members of the roundtable: GFSA, ISS, SaferAfrica, South African Institute for International Affairs, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, CCR, Ceasefire Campaign and the Network of Independent Monitors.

In May 2003, a research training workshop jointly organised by the Institute for Security Studies, CCR, GFSA and the International Action Network on

Small Arms for the researchers of this project, as well as researchers from other African countries. The workshop provided the researchers with an opportunity to share information and views about small arms issues in their countries, and to develop methodologies which were both specific to the conditions in each country and which allowed for a comparative analysis of the information gathered.

In April 2004, a regional consultative meeting took place in Johannesburg, which provided researchers and government representatives with an opportunity to discuss and debate the research findings, as well as consider future activities for this network. In many countries the organisations involved in this project will be represented on National Focal Points. The National Focal Points are structures which bring together relevant state structures and civil society to identify and address the problems associated with the proliferation and control of small arms and light weapons. The research findings of this project will assist these civil society organisations to engage in more effective lobbying and advocacy in these forums.

### ***Structure of the report***

This monograph presents the results of the research project, which were finalised in April 2004, and is comprised of nine country chapters (in alphabetical order), as well as a concluding chapter that compares and analyses the data from the country studies.

The South African chapter is substantially longer and more detailed than the other chapters for two reasons. First, the nature and extent of firearm ownership, manufacture, trade, use and misuse is substantially greater in South Africa than in any other country in southern Africa. For example, South Africa has approximately five times the combined total of licenced civilian firearms than the other eight southern African countries. In addition, of the 46 nations surveyed by the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 1997, South Africa was identified as having the second highest homicide rate involving firearms (26.63 per 100,000 persons). Second, South African researchers were able to access a wide variety of data, due to the relative sophistication of the data management systems of the South African Police Service and South African National Defence Force, and the existence of the Promotion of Access to

Information Act, which gives South Africans the right to request information that is held by the state (with some exceptions).

In the other eight countries, most researchers experienced difficulties in gaining access to detailed state-held information about small arms and light weapons, because governments generally view this information as a matter of national security, and were therefore reluctant to share it with civil society researchers. In addition, there was poor record-keeping in certain countries.

The Zimbabwe chapter also differs from the other country chapters, as its main focus is the political crisis in Zimbabwe and the role of firearms in this regard. The reason for this is that the current crisis in Zimbabwe has seriously limited the extent to which civil society organisations can safely undertake in-depth, independent research, particularly on sensitive issues like small arms and light weapons. For example the Zimbabwe police refused to provide the researchers with any official information on small arms and light weapons. Despite this, the chapter provides information on the history of small arms use, the nature of the firearms licensing procedure, and the Zimbabwe Defence Industries.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Article 1 of the Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region.
- 2 These organisations generally publish their research through in-house publications. For example, the Institute for Security Studies presents research findings and analysis on small arms in its quarterly journal *African Security Review* and its monograph series. Just over 10% of the total monograph series focuses exclusively on issues of small arms and light weapons.