

UK Policy and Strategic Priorities on Small Arms and Light Weapons 2004-2006

The SALW problem: global, national and local

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world is a major source of insecurity and poverty. By fuelling conflict, crime and terrorism, the presence of small arms and light weapons undermines peace and greatly hinders development. The threat and use of these weapons has caused untold human suffering. Although small arms themselves do not cause conflict, easy access to weapons makes violence more lethal and conflict more protracted. Millions have been killed or injured countless more livelihoods destroyed and communities displaced.

Because they are easy to acquire and simple to use, small arms and light weapons are the weapons of choice for criminals, terrorists and combatants alike. Estimates of the numbers of available weapons vary, but even if all new production were to cease tomorrow, there

What are small arms and light weapons?

Although there is no internationally agreed definition of small arms and light weapons, they are generally considered to be weapons that can be used by one or two people. Small arms are designed for individual use, and include pistols, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons are designed to be deployed and used by a small crew, such as man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS), recoilless rifles and mortars of less than 100mm calibre.

would still be hundreds of millions of small arms and light weapons in circulation. A lack of adequate regulation has meant that significant quantities of weapons are diverted into the black market, from where they easily fall into the wrong hands.

People living in the developing world suffer disproportionately from the affects of small arms and light weapons, but richer countries are by no means immune to these problems. In the UK, guns may only be used in 0.18% of crimes, but armed crime has brought suffering to communities across the country.

The British government is committed to reducing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the threat they pose and the damage they cause. It recognises that these problems are complex and inter-related, and require concerted action

between states, intergovernmental organisations and civil society. This needs to be taken at all levels, from the local to the global, if we are to reduce the human cost of these weapons.

The UK's Objectives

The British Government is committed to working both at home and abroad to limiting the availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons. We focus our efforts on three critical, related areas:

- 1) Strengthening controls on the **supply** of small arms and light weapons;
- 2) Reducing the **availability** of weapons; and
- 3) Addressing the **demand** for weapons.

Controlling supply

The control of small arms and light weapons supplies is critical to combating easy availability and misuse. However, this is by no means a straightforward task. Small arms and light weapons have many legitimate military and civilian uses, and their production is highly decentralised – almost 1,250 companies operating in at least 92 countries produce

weapons, parts or ammunition.¹ Nevertheless, stronger national, regional and international controls are essential if we are to prevent arms that start their lives as legal exports from ending up in the possession of criminals or combatants.

Around the world the UK is working to build greater international support for such controls.

The UK government has launched the Transfer Control Initiative, the seeds of which were sown at an international conference in London in January 2003. Through the initiative, the UK and others are building support among states on the need for strong controls on the export, import and transshipment of small arms and light weapons, which prevent irresponsible transfers that might contribute to instability, conflict or repression.

Diverse security concerns mean different regions approach this problem with distinct perspectives. Many countries are now constructively engaged in a regional process with the UK and key partners in carrying forward this process through regional consultation in areas such as Latin America, East and West Africa and South East Asia, where the small arms problem is acute. We aim to seek common international standards on small arms and light weapons transfers at the first full review meeting of the UN Programme of Action in 2006.

The UK will continue to champion responsibility and transparency in small arms transfers in the regional (and similar) bodies in which it participates. However, political commitment is only the first step, and the UK government will work with others to ensure effective implementation, particularly in countries where capacity is limited.

The UK fully supports effective agreed international measures to ensure all firearms are marked and can be traced.

How has the international community responded to the problem?

Both governments and civil society organizations have become increasingly concerned that small arms and light weapons are taking a heavy toll on security and development. International agreement has been forming on common standards of control. At the global level, the United Nations agreed a far-reaching Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons in 2001, to which the UK has pledged its support. The UK has also helped secure comprehensive agreements in regional forums such as the European Union (EU), the Wassenaar Arrangement of Arms Exporting States, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Similar commitments that focus on specific issues of common regional concern have been secured in other areas of the world. For example, in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa, eleven governments signed the Nairobi Protocol in 2004, which requires them to legislate against the illicit trade in small arms.

Target 1: Stronger controls on small arms transfers

Prior to 2006, the UK will work with others to achieve:

- International consensus on stronger controls on transfers of small arms and light weapons;
- New global controls where control is lax, such as the activities of arms brokers and the marking and tracing of weapons;
- Greater capacity to implement effective transfer controls.

¹ These figures and others are taken from *Small Arms Survey 2004: Rights at Risk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Regionally, we are strong supporters of the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports. In the field of multilateral export controls, the UK played a key role in the adoption by the Wassenaar Arrangement of 'Best Practice Guidelines for Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons' in December 2002, and an agreement in December 2003 for the reporting of small arms and light weapons transfers. The UK also took a lead in widening the scope of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. In 2003, the 58th Session of the General Assembly endorsed the lowering of the artillery threshold from 100mm to 75mm, and including, for the first time, the reporting of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS). These adjustments will enhance the Register's relevance to a number of sub-regions around the world, particularly in Africa and contribute to broad-based efforts to stem illicit transfers. The UK is also actively promoting responsibility in SALW transfers in the OSCE.

Reducing availability

Failure to collect, manage and, where appropriate, destroy small arms and light weapons immediately after peace settlements are reached allows them to circulate into new conflict regions or previously peaceful countries, where they can have a destabilizing impact. Weapons seeping over the borders in South Eastern Europe, for example, played a role in igniting tensions between communities there. It is equally important to secure military and police stocks, which can be vulnerable to large-scale theft. Stocks of weapons that are surplus to requirements should be destroyed so that they can no longer be misused.

The UK is committed to helping governments and their security agencies properly manage and secure their weapons stocks, and destroy surplus weapons. Programmes to collect surplus weapons are immediate and tangible ways of addressing insecurity, and public destruction of the weapons can be a powerful symbol of the commitment to peace.

How can small arms and light weapons be removed after conflict ends?

In post conflict societies, former fighters who are not properly demobilised and reintegrated into society often continue to use their weapons to make a living, terrorising local communities and contributing to high rates of crime and violence in the process. Some countries have actually witnessed higher rates of gun deaths after conflicts have ended. In such unstable environments, post-conflict reconstruction and development can never even begin to take root. Only through comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), undertaken as part and parcel of the peace building process, can post-conflict societies avoid this cycle of violence and insecurity. The UK government provides support for DDR processes that include the collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons as integral components of the disarmament phase, and that address high weapons availability and use among civilians through legislative review and control.

Destruction is also one of the most practical, inexpensive and effective methods of breaking the cycle of weapons proliferation.

The UK has given substantial financial support to several weapons collection, management and destruction programmes. We have provided £7.5 million for programmes managed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to collect, manage and destroy weapons and ammunition in over 25 countries. In countries such as Sierra Leone, these programmes are closely linked to the social and economic reintegration of former combatants, and to community development projects.

Reducing weapons availability is also a major priority at home. The UK has held a number of amnesties in recent years, which allow any unwanted or illegally held firearms to be handed in for destruction. The most recent

amnesty in April 2003 saw the surrender of 44,000 guns (including air weapons and imitations) and over 1 million rounds of ammunition.

Target 2: Systematic weapons collection, management and destruction

- The UK will continue to seek opportunities to collect and destroy weapons and ammunition as they arise, in partnership with others.
- The UK will continue to support efforts to systematically include weapons and ammunition collection, management and destruction as integral elements of peace support operations, including through effective demobilisation, disarmament and rehabilitation (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR).
- By 2006, the UK, in partnership with others, aims to develop coordinated policy and best practice on these issues.

Both in countries emerging from conflict and in largely peaceful societies, it is important to restrict access to small arms and light weapons, particularly military-style weapons though effective controls on civilian possession and use. The UK supports the development of national and regional measures to strengthen such controls, and hopes to see closer agreement at the international level to regulate civilian ownership of such weapons.

This approach is reflected in UK's own domestic legislation, which includes some of the strictest gun controls in the world. The UK is committed to taking forward a range of additional measures to build on what is already in place. A five year minimum sentence has now been introduced for those convicted of possessing or dealing in prohibited weapons. A maximum sentence of 10 years already applies. A new offence of carrying a replica or air weapon in a public place without reasonable excuse is being introduced, and air weapons that can be easily converted to fire conventional bullets are to be banned.

Armed crime cannot be tackled in isolation from measures to combat other violent crimes such as drug dealing, and policing measures targeted against particular groups of criminals have been introduced in the UK. Funds are being made available to support community groups working against gun crime.

In our efforts to combat illicit trafficking and possessions, a new computerised National Firearms Forensic Database will help trace guns used in crime. Internationally, the UK is actively working with the European Commission and EU Member States on the implementation of the provisions of the UN Protocol on Firearms, a legally binding international agreement that criminalizes illicit manufacture and trade, and requires governments to keep accurate records of firearms transfers.

Addressing demand

The UK recognises that controlling the supply and reducing the availability of weapons is not enough – we need to do more to address the root causes of armed violence. The factors that lead people to acquire small arms and light weapons are complex and often poorly understood, but a better grasp of the motivations driving illicit gun possession and use is essential for developing targeted programmes. Reducing demand for guns will require a commitment to long-term, sustainable development, improved public security in communities, heightened public awareness, and increased alternative livelihood opportunities, including for former combatants. Resolving the structural problems that underpin insecurity and gun violence is essential. This in turn requires the integration of small arms reduction measures into development programmes, ranging from police reform to community development, public health and education work.

Following a workshop in April 2003, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has launched a multi-donor initiative to document the impact of arms availability and armed violence on poor people and pro-poor policies and programmes. This research initiative has brought together government, multilateral and non-governmental development agencies to explore ways to integrate small arms reduction into development assistance, increase co-operation between development and security actors, particularly on the ground. However, this should not detract from stand-alone small arms control programmes. The findings and recommendations from this project will be used to strengthen the design, implementation and evaluation of such programmes, and to develop best practice in key international forums such as the OECD and others.

Target 3: Integrating armed violence reduction into development assistance

Before 2006, the UK will, in partnership with other development agencies and donors:

- Support further research and analysis into the armed violence and arms availability on poverty and development;
- Promote increased donor co-ordination on armed violence issues;
- Work to comprehensively integrate armed violence prevention and small arms reduction into its own development assistance and encourage other bilateral and multilateral agencies to do the same.

Annex 1:

The UK Government's work on small arms

The UK aims to join together its work on small arms across government departments, to ensure greater coherence and complementarity. An inter-departmental Small Arms Policy Committee meets regularly to review progress and develop policy direction. The main tool for supporting small arms activities is the joint DFID, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence small arms programme of the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, which is managed by DFID. Table 1 below summarises the lead departments for various small arms activities across UK government.

Table 1: UK Government departments' small arms responsibilities

Government Department	Small arms activities
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Counter-Proliferation Department)*	Diplomatic policy oversight and coordination with other UK government departments of UK implementation of the UNPoA on Small Arms and Light Weapons including contributing to the Global Conflict Prevention Pool on SALW.
Department of Trade and Industry	Provides the licensing authorities for both the export from the UK and import into the UK of small arms and light weapons. Works in cooperation with other relevant UK government departments to assess licence applications. Responsibility for maintaining the relevant legislation supporting these functions.
Department for International Development (Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department)*	Seeks to reduce armed violence in poverty-affected countries. Key objective is to develop policies and programmes for integrating small arms reduction measures into DFID's wider development programmes. Manages the Global Conflict Prevention Pool Small Arms Strategy and programmes. Lead department for donor co-ordination.
HM Customs and Excise	Customs role is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to prevent the illicit importation into, exportation from, and transshipment through, the UK of SALW; • to seize or detain SALW imported, exported or transhipped without a licence; • to investigate offences relating to the above and to trafficking and brokering in SALW in the UK, or by UK persons overseas when the destination is subject to an arms embargo; • to institute proceedings where sufficient evidence of a Customs offence exists; • to disrupt brokering activity; • to assist UK police and the relevant authorities of other States with their prosecutions.
Ministry of Defence (Counter-Proliferation and Arms Control Directorate)*	The MOD has specific, and often unique, SALW technical expertise. The MOD's wide range of SALW activities include providing advice on policy development, export licensing issues, and practical assistance on collection, stockpile management, security and destruction of SALW. The MOD works with the FCO and DfID in international and multilateral

	fora to build consensus with other Governments, particularly defence ministries, on the need for engagement on all aspects of SALW issues. As with FCO, DFID and other UK departments, the MOD shares an objective for international security; and therefore is fully committed to the UNPoA SALW.
Home Office	Development of policy on domestic controls and guidance to police including issuing Section 5 Authorities for controlling prohibited weapons.
National Criminal Intelligence Service NCIS	Liaison with other agencies including gathering intelligence on illicit trafficking, maintenance of firearms tracking system.

* part of Global Conflict Prevention Pool Small Arms Strategy (see below)

Annex 2:

The Global Conflict Prevention Pool – Strategy on Small Arms

In July 2000, the UK Government set up two innovative pools of resources to support conflict prevention activities across all departments - the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool and the Global Conflict Prevention Pool. The Pools are managed jointly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. The Global Conflict Prevention Pool, responsible for conflict prevention activities in key countries, regions and relevant cross-cutting issues outside Africa, includes a strategy on small arms.

This SALW Strategy brings together existing programmes run by the three departments under a single set of objectives and resources. The Strategy is administered by DFID, with support and advice from a small steering group of officials from FCO and MOD. Amongst its other responsibilities, the Small Arms Policy Committee oversees the work of the strategy, and ensures that activities pursued under it are complementary to wider UK small arms policy and programmes. The UK Government is committed to providing substantial resources to the implementation of the Small Arms Strategy. Where appropriate, the Strategy works in conjunction with other strategies within the Global Pool, particularly the Security Sector Reform Strategy and key country or regional strategies, and with the strategies of the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool.

The GCPP SALW strategy works to reduce armed violence by controlling and reducing the supply, availability and demand for small arms and light weapons, by focusing on the following areas:

- Policy-focused research and analysis;
- Raising awareness and building consensus among governments and civil society on the need for increased controls;
- Implementation of practical projects such as weapons collection, management and destruction and capacity building of police and customs officers; and
- The integration of small arms controls into wider conflict prevention, development assistance and defence diplomacy programmes.

The UK believes that working in partnership with others internationally, regionally, sub-regionally and nationally is critical to achieving meaningful results – with other donors, governments, and international organisations including the agencies of the UN, regional organisations and civil society organisations. Examples of UK support for these partnerships include:

- Financial support to the UN's activities through the UN Development Programme's Small Arms and Demobilisation Unit;
- Funding for implementing regional agreements on small arms, such as the Nairobi Declaration and Protocol.
- Support for the development of National Action Plans for the Governments of Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda; and
- Increasing capacity amongst civil society groups and non-governmental organisations.