The Impact of Small Arms on Children and Armed Conflict

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Small Arms and Light Weapons

United Nations Definition

- Small arms: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns.

- Light weapons: machine guns, hand-held multi-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, rocket-launched anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, systems and mortars with a maximum calibre of 100 mm.

- Firearms
  - Military firearms
  - Rocket propelled grenades
  - Mortars

- Man-Portable Surface-to-Air Missiles (MANPADS)

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Weapons, Weapons Everywhere

- 875 million small arms in circulation
- $4 billion: annual legal small arms trade
- $1 billion: annual illicit small arms trade
- Over 1200 companies in more than 90 countries
- 8 million new small arms produced annually
- 10-14 billion new rounds of ammunition produced annually
Weapons of Individual Destruction

- Hundreds of thousands of conflict deaths every year
- 200,000 non-combat deaths from firearms every year (accidents, suicides, murders)

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Direct Effects of Small Arms on Children

- Deaths
- Injuries
- Psycho-social trauma
- Human rights abuses
- Refugees and other displacement

Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Indirect Effects of Small Arms on Children

• Diminishment of support structures
• Limited access to public goods
• Reduced educational opportunities
• Lack of health services
• Denied economic growth and development opportunities

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Consequential Effects of Small Arms on Children

Cultures of Violence

- Weapons seen as tools for conflict resolution
- Children believe violence is essential
- Violence is used to gain power, obtain goods and services, and establish respect
- Culture of violence

Child Soldiers

- Small arms make the role of child soldiers more feasible
- Child soldiers are driven by factors such as the need for jobs, poverty, or lack of education
- Sexual abuse committed particularly to girls

Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Child Soldiers

• At least 250,000 child soldiers in conflict zones worldwide.
• Child soldiers currently participating in at least 17 conflicts.
• Child soldiers recruited or used by 8 governments or government-supported armed groups.
• U.S. provides FMS, DCS, EDA, IMET, or FMF to 6 of these 8 countries.
What Do We Do?

Four-pronged strategy

1. Control Weapons Availability
2. Address the Use of Child Soldiers
3. Protect Children
4. Provide Opportunities

Multiple Levels

National
Regional
Global

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Reduce the Availability of Weapons

Develop arms export regulations and export criteria
• Ensure adherence to arms embargoes
• Strengthen oversight of existing national laws and weapons stocks
  develop a common international end-use certificate and other shipping
documents
• Implement effective end-use monitoring
• Improve cooperation within and between states
• Destroy surplus of obsolete weapons
• Monitor arms transfer, management, and storage of weapons
stockpiles

Develop effective Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
(DDR)
Create weapons collection and buy-back programs
Address the Use of Child Soldiers

- Support universal ratification and full implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Conflict
- Stop selling arms to governments that use child soldiers or support their use by militia groups

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Protect Children

- Safeguard the security of children in conflict and post-conflict areas
- Prevent cultures of violence
- Protect children from recruitment
- Identify at-risk youth and dangerous locations

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense
Provide Opportunities

- Ensure education and awareness building
- Create programs to strengthen peaceful methods of conflict resolution, and alternatives to violence, and crime
- Develop youth-specific DDR programs
- Provide and strengthen alternatives to soldiering and crime