

bulletin

Small Arms and Human Security

This edition of the Bulletin focuses on Central Asia – a region of insecurity and great potential instability. The two opinion pieces in this issue offer ideas for promoting disarmament in Afghanistan and improving policing in Kyrgyzstan, respectively. Send us your comments on these articles and any recent relevant information from the region and we will post your comments on the HDC website as an addendum to this issue.

Central Asia: Guns, politics and power

Several factors endemic to Central Asia contribute to small arms proliferation and misuse in this region.

One of these factors is the region's unnatural borders. With the exception of Afghanistan, the countries of Central Asia were republics of the Soviet Union, gaining independence in 1991. Boundaries were largely determined by Stalin's economic needs rather than ethnic or historical boundaries. Since the demise of the Soviet Union tensions related to these somewhat arbitrary borders have often surfaced violently.

Another factor is the weak political culture and rule of law. Governments of the region routinely use their security forces for political ends, and human rights protection has never been high on their agenda. Nevertheless, when these countries joined the international 'war on terror', Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan became major recipients of US military assistance, although the US State Department simultaneously criticised them for human rights offences. (In 2004 the US State Department cut aid to Uzbekistan because of the government's remarkably poor human rights record.)

Afghanistan is a third factor. Protracted wars and heroin production in this country have further added to the gun flows through the region. Gun running is common-

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place across the porous borders with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. And shooting battles between border guards and drug and gun traffickers occur on an almost weekly basis along the Tajik-Afghan border. Surprisingly, it is often said that even more guns flow into Afghanistan through its porous border with Pakistan.¹

Religious intolerance and repressive government policies are other factors. Political Islam is seen by incumbent governments (all except Tajikistan are incumbent since before independence in 1991) as a threat. Restrictions against 'Islamists' were one of the main points of contention in the Tajikistan civil war during 1992–1997. The Uzbekistan government's crackdowns on 'Islamists' have led to growth of militant Islamic groups in the last five years.

The Ferghana Valley – shared between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – is usually portrayed as a security factor on its own. With weak and ineffective border controls, it has been a centre of drug trafficking, terrorism, potential ethnic violence and weapons smuggling. Growing population, unemployment and competition for resources – particularly water – has contributed to the ongoing tension, fuelled by easy access to weapons flowing through the region.

A snapshot of the region

During the 1992–97 civil war in **Tajikistan**, insurgents were supported with weapons coming across the border from Afghanistan.² Government forces were supplied with guns by Uzbekistan and Russia, which still has thousands of troops stationed there, although they are in the process of withdrawing. The principal weapons flowing to both sides were Russian-made Kalashnikov assault rifles (both AK-47 and AK-74 models), as well as Makarov pistols, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.³ At least 60,000 people were killed during the war and the violence left some 500,000 people internally displaced, pushing 20,000 refugees into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and another 75,000 into war-ravaged Afghanistan.⁴

“In Tajikistan, power is weapons”

Abdumollik Abdullojonov, defeated presidential candidate, 1994 elections

In 1996 the Tajik government passed a new weapons law, with implementing legislation following in 2000. The vast majority of gun permits are issued for hunting or sporting guns, and weapons collection programmes, both forceful and voluntary, have reduced the stock of privately owned guns. Licensing procedures, safe storage requirements and restrictions on imports and exports all feature in the new legislation.⁵ There are about 10,000 guns registered in the country but it is virtually impossible to estimate the number of illegally held weapons (estimates start at 20,000).⁶

Drug traffickers are known to carry weapons, both for defence and for sale, and captured drugs have regularly been accompanied by weapons.⁷ In addition, weapons caches left by militants after the war are regularly discovered by Tajik forces. Currently the Russian military provide financial and technological support to the Tajikistan border guards. When these troops are pulled out in September 2005 it is feared that cross-border drugs and weapons smuggling will increase.

Outside of the major cities Dushanbe and Khujand, and especially in the mountainous regions of Garm and Badakhshon, it is still considered unsafe to travel unescorted. However, statistics of violence and crime involving guns are difficult to obtain and are generally unreliable.

In **Uzbekistan**, government intolerance towards 'Islamists' has succeeded in building support for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), one of the most active armed groups in the region. IMU staged two major incursions, in 1999 and 2000, into the southern Batken region of Kyrgyzstan from the mountains of Tajikistan, in attempts to enter Uzbekistan. These involved hostage-taking and major armed clashes between Kyrgyz army and the militants, leading to many dozens of deaths on both sides. In 1999, members of IMU arranged a series of bomb explosions at major government sites in Tashkent, allegedly targeting President Karimov. A series of homemade bombs exploded in early summer of 2004 at sites including a bazaar, the American Embassy and governmental targets.

Information on weapons possession and non-political armed crime is difficult to access due to a lack of transparency. In the regions of Namangan, Andijan and Ferghana, regarded as 'hotbeds' of strong Islamic identity, disaffected and oppressed populations have suffered numerous arbitrary and secret arrests and disappearances.

Kazakhstan is the only gun manufacturer in the region, applying pre-1990 standards for marking guns, moni-

toring sales and registering holders of weapons. The Kazakh government has instituted a Defence Industry Committee, under the Ministry of Industry, which oversees arms production and export. Questions about its competence have arisen concerning end-user certification and regulations on arms brokering.⁸

The overall legislation on weapons in Kazakhstan is not very different from other regional countries, all of which base their weapons laws on Soviet era laws. They have provisions on civilian and special services possession, classification, licensing and certification, weapons circulation, and storing of stockpiles.

"Even an unloaded gun fires once a year" Kyrgyzstan proverb

According to the *Almaty Karavan*, one in five Kazakh men own guns. Meanwhile, it has been reported that 80% of crimes in Kazakhstan involve weapons.⁹ This crime is mainly the work of organised mafia. The relatively money-rich economy in Kazakhstan has led to the growth of fully-armed criminal groups who fight each other for turf, as well as attack businesses.

In neighbouring **Kyrgyzstan**, often regarded as the most liberal of the Central Asian states, there is one licensed gun for every seventy people. Fifty-eight deaths from gun use were recorded in 2000,¹⁰ and it is estimated that there are 15 to 30 non-fatal gun related injuries annually.¹¹ Armed crime in the country is on the rise. Within the last two years, there were at least five assassinations – mostly of businessmen and a Colonel who had assumed the position of chief of the anti-corruption group within the Internal Affairs Ministry. These murders, mainly carried out in broad daylight in the capital city of Bishkek, have heightened the public sense of insecurity.

Militant Islamic incursions into the country in 1999 and 2000 are said to have left arms caches in the mountains, posing a potential for both casual armed crime and armed political insurgency.

In March 2002, in the region of Aksy, police indiscriminately shot at a group protesting the arrest of an opposition figure.¹² Six people were killed and more injured. These murders sent a shockwave through the country, led to the resignation of the prime minister and his cabinet and raised issues about the competence of the police. Police reform and training were initiated following the incident, sponsored, among others, by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Nakibullah Gul, aged three, was abducted from the outskirts of Kandahar in Afghanistan in early 2004. His 32-day kidnap ordeal lasted until his father, a cloth-maker, found the money to pay the \$4,500 ransom. By that time, Nakibullah had lost a finger and a toe. A ransom letter sent with his finger, said: "We have guns and no-one can arrest us, you should pay the money if you want your child."¹³

In a region where the topic of weapons and security is still seen as taboo for public involvement, Kyrgyzstan has a relatively more developed civil society involvement. Civil society in this country can be expected to mount increasing pressure for government to tackle crime, police incompetence and arms circulation. See the Foundation for Tolerance International's opinion piece in this Bulletin.

Ironically and now often overlooked, in **Afghanistan** US forces fighting the 'war on terror' are confronted with weapons given to the *mujahadin* 'freedom fighters' by previous US governments. Combined with the copious amounts of weapons left by the Russians when they retreated, it is almost impossible to estimate how many weapons are in the country. The impact of these weapons are felt across the entire region and into South Asia. The harsh and porous borders of Afghanistan remain a critical security challenge. Robin Poulton offers some thoughts on the daunting task of disarmament in a separate opinion piece in this bulletin.

Beginning to address the problem

Both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have appointed national focal points as called for in the UN Programme of Action. Tajikistan was the only nation to submit a report on implementation of the UN Programme in 2003, but no country has reported so far this year.

The regional organisation most actively working to restrict gun flows is the OSCE. All countries with the exception of Afghanistan are members of the OSCE, and each country has signed up to the non-binding OSCE agreements relating to small arms.

NATO also has demonstrated an active interest in the region. The OSCE and NATO are most concerned with stockpile security and arms trafficking across the region. Yet there is little record of surplus weapons destruction. For example, while the Tajikistan government continues to recover weapons left over from the civil war (nearly 26,000 by June 2003), there is no policy of destroying these weapons. The weapons are mainly kept for use by the armed forces of the country, and authorities justify this policy by the country's lack of weapons production, inability to afford necessary new weapons and the wearing out of existing stocks. Only unusable weapons were destroyed on limited occasions in the country, according to officials.¹⁴

None of the states regulate arms brokering, the private and often illegal 'profession' of facilitating arms deals. Viktor Bout, the notorious Tajikistan-born Russian UN sanctions-buster, is alleged to operate out of Tajikistan, among his many other ports worldwide, with complete impunity.

Central Asian states are likely to continue to generate armed opposition and inadvertently support the burgeoning trade in heroin originating from Afghanistan without interlinked strategies to build effective security forces, enhance human rights and promote religious tolerance. The key issues include stockpile management, destruction of surplus arms, stringent border controls, harmon-

ised standards on private ownership of weapons and reform of corrupt, abusive or ineffective police and military forces.

The small but growing civil society across the region plays an important role in documenting the issues, as well as offering policy options for national and international action. However, this pressure has had little effect and the suppression of dissenting voices has been well documented, particularly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Options for action

With picturesque mountains and lakes and replete with diverse cultures, Central Asian states have considerable tourist potential; demonstrable disarmament would go a long way to tapping into this potential by reassuring tourists. Most significantly, greater sharing of natural resources and ethnic and religious tolerance would reduce the recourse to armed opposition. These factors fuel the demand for weapons and require committed interventions from a variety of actors.

Donors and regional organisations can play leading roles in encouraging greater transparency, accountability and tolerance. The growing nexus between security sector reform and small arms control is an issue where donors can be particularly active.

In the lead up to the 2006 Review Conference on the UN Programme of Action, Central Asian governments have a window of opportunity to demonstrate their national and regional commitment to controlling the illicit trade in small arms *in all its aspects*.

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Notes

¹ Personal correspondence with Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi, director of the Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau, 3 October 2004

² In conversation with journalists in May 2002, Jurabek Aminov (deputy head of the Tajikistan KGB) said that 10–15 per cent of the insurgent's weapons came from Afghanistan. After the 1997 peace agreement 182 tons of weapons brought into the country by fighters repatriated from Afghanistan were 'lost' without trace. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2003), *The Central Asian Islamic opposition movements*, Humanitarian engagement with armed groups case study Vol 1 No 1, p. 15

³ International Alert (2004), *Small Arms Control in Central Asia*, Eurasia Series No. 4, pp. 17–18, available at www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubsec/MISAC_eurasia_4.pdf

⁴ Bobi Pirsedji (2002), *The Small Arms Problem In Central Asia: Features and implications*, UNIDIR, p. 41

⁵ Government of Tajikistan (2003), *Report on Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons*, available at: <http://disarmament2.un.org/cab/salw-nationalreports.html>

⁶ International Alert (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 18

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ International Alert (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 29

⁹ Almaty Karavan, *Weapons possession among citizens on the rise*, 25 April 1997; As reported by Pirsedji (2002), p. 84

¹⁰ S. Neil MacFarlane and Stina Torjesen (2004), *Kyrgyzstan: A Small Arms Anomaly In Central Asia?*, Small Arms Survey, p. 20, available at www.smallarmssurvey.org/ops/OP12%20kyrgyzstan.pdf

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Emil Juraev in the Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst online magazine, *Aksy: A Turning Point, or A Bump on a Downward Slope?* 24 April 2002; available at www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=28

¹³ Jenny Cuffe, BBC Radio 4, *Afghan children targeted by criminals*, 30 June 2004; available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3851687.stm

¹⁴ International Alert (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 20; also, interviews by International Alert with representatives of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Committee on Guarding State Borders, June 2003

Police reform in Kyrgyzstan

Law-enforcement systems aim to provide clear and fair implementation of national laws for all citizens. In most countries, police regard themselves as ‘public servants’. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Kyrgyzstan where dissatisfaction with policing has been growing for decades.

Bribery, abuse of office and corruption are visible throughout the law-enforcement structure from the local policemen to the Minister of Internal Affairs. A policeman who earns about \$10 to \$15 per month has a much better lifestyle than a schoolteacher, for example, due to corruption.

In late 2003, Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) held a seminar on conflict transformation with many of the participants from villages in the Aksy district. Asked: “What do you associate with the word ‘police?’”, people wrote the following words: violence, truncheons, handcuffs, fear, insult, humiliation, bribes, beating, extortion. Only one participant wrote a positive word: law.

“Before, we used to keep our children off the streets because of the fear of bandits and criminals. Today, we fear the police, because at any time and under any circumstances they can detain, insult, and humiliate our children just to extort bribes from them,” explained a resident about why they were prohibiting the police from working in their villages.

The long-simmering tension between the police and the population escalated dramatically in March 2002, when police opened fire on civilian protesters in Aksy, killing five and wounding twenty-seven. The group of about 300 demonstrators were protesting the illegal arrest of Azimbek Beknazarov, a member of the Kyrgyzstan Parliament and a well-known critic of the President. Beknazarov, who had initiated the process in Parliament of impeaching President Akaev, had been detained under suspicion of committing a crime seven years previously.

Armed with machine guns, truncheons and shields, the police stopped these peaceful demonstrators and demanded their retreat. When the demonstrators refused and demanded justice from the authorities, the police fired into the crowd. According to one of the victims, Anaral Nazarbekov, when he was shot in the stomach and lying half-dead, policemen opened his palm, put a stone in his hand and tried to photograph him in order to use the photograph as ‘evidence’ that the demonstrators had provoked the police by throwing stones. Nazarbekov said he “collected his remaining strength and threw the stone away, losing consciousness shortly afterwards.”¹

These events incited a wave of peaceful protests around the country. Yet abuses of power did not stop even after the Aksy events. People protesting the Aksy massacre were arrested on 19–20 March 2002, and one of the detainees testified: “The policemen completely undressed us, tied our hands, and beat us with truncheons. When one of us would lose consciousness, they would splash cold water on that person. Later, I found out that cold water helps to prevent the formation of bruises and

edema.” There is evidence that one pregnant woman miscarried a few days after being beaten by the policemen.

Moreover, no high-level officials were punished for the deaths of peaceful protesters in Aksy. Instead, some of the high-level officials whom people considered to be directly involved in the tragedy were promoted.

Under such circumstances, where the public lacks trust in the competence and intentions of the police, and where there is no system of accountability for police misdeeds, the citizenry might feel the need to arm themselves – to defend themselves from the corrupt police and criminals. Weapons proliferation and vigilantism are by-products of a failure to devise a just and competent law-enforcement system.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has projects improving police capacity centred in two districts of Bishkek, the capital city. The OSCE project aims to improve the professional level of the police. Many training manuals and guidelines contain terms that convey an aggressive undertone (such as ‘liquidate’, ‘do not allow’, ‘forbid’, ‘destroy’). Much can be done to transform policing in the country.

FTI is also working to bring the local population and police into dialogue – most notably in the ‘Dialogue, Trust and Law in Aksy’ project. FTI managed to bring together 50 representatives of local governments, law-enforcement agencies and the opposition in an initial roundtable discussion that lasted for six hours. It was a challenge to facilitate the roundtable, since many of the participants were armed, as they saw dangerous enemies in one another. At the end, the participants developed recommendations for the authorities, law-enforcement agencies, opposition parties, international donor organisations and NGOs.

During the process FTI was able to facilitate better communication between the police and the population and lay down some steps for future work as it is not possible to resolve the problems in a short time. We consider the most successful outcome of the project to be the request by both the population and the police to continue the project.

FTI believes that the following principles will best promote effective police reform in Kyrgyzstan:

- Serving police officers need to have their qualifications and attitudes evaluated to a set of internationally recognised standards.
- The government needs to allocate resources for police reform, and create an independent authority to lead the process.
- Corruption needs to be tackled at all levels of society.
- Police officers need to be open to change and recognise that their profession is one of public service.
- Citizens need to be involved in decisions about police reform; taking up a weapon in defence only becomes another part of the problem.

This article was contributed by the Foundation for Tolerance International in Kyrgyzstan, www.fti.org.kg

Notes

¹ Personal communication with authors and Alun Howard, 19 October 2004

Afghanistan: New approaches for weapons management

A recent article in *Le Monde* claims, rather unfairly, that ‘the [Afghan] government’s disarmament programme has been a signal failure’.¹ Actually, the Afghan New Beginnings Project for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) has been surprisingly successful under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Initiated in October 2003, the programme has demobilised and disarmed 20,000 combatants, about 30% of the number officially identified but probably only 10% of those who will one day need to be disarmed. In addition, the project has collected around 15,000 small arms and 2,780 heavy weapons.²

DDR efforts will ultimately fail unless the US-led coalition can establish security through the entire country. Peace remains elusive in part because Afghanistan is not a coherent nation-state; the country was created in the 1880s as a buffer between the British and Russian empires. Many Afghans feel closer to their ethnic or regional identity than to ‘Afghanistan’. Warlords continue to rule the country and the central government is too weak to exert much influence in most regions.

The allies’ short-term interests in fighting the ‘war on terror’ have further strengthened the hands of the warlords – or at least failed to constrain them. Madeleine Albright and Robin Cook recently asserted that, “Afghanistan continues to stumble along, barely one level above that of a failed state. ... The world should have given the warlords a choice: reform or retire. Instead, we put them on the payroll. US forces rely on local militias for assistance against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This enhances the power of militia leaders, undermining the government’s efforts to rein in organised military groups. And it validates the tradition of regional groups competing for money and power by ‘rule of the gun’.”³

Even without these challenges, a gun-free society is no more feasible in Afghanistan than in the USA. Pashtun boys receive their first rifle at puberty, with which to defend their family honour. Some new form of weapons control must be found that fits the reality of Afghanistan.

One new approach that might prove successful would be to decentralise weapons management. Under this scenario, each province would be given a new (or revamped) central armoury in which official and surrendered small arms and light weapons could be stored. Registration numbers of all weapons would be recorded and safe storage would be emphasised.

Drawing upon the vital Afghan concept of honour, warlords might be persuaded to register most of their weapons to justify their title of ‘commander’ (or some additional enticement might be provided through investment in local development/reconstruction under their control.) Warlords might not surrender their larger weapons, but the act of registering them would create accountability and information-sharing. Afghan warlords may not give up power to the Defence Minister,

but they might accept an international and neutral authority to register weapons as, for example, the Irish Republican Army has done.

For small arms and light weapons, registration might be delegated to the newly elected Community Development Councils (CDCs). Doing so would achieve two major goals at once: it would reinforce the central government’s democratic governance strategy and utilise the influence of traditional community elders to challenge that of the ‘commanders’. Community elders control the *qawm* or lineage-support group, without which no Afghan can survive. Strengthening the CDCs and using them to register weapons would create a ‘rule of law’ that would counter the ‘rule of the gun’. The *qawm* mechanism would be used to enforce the rule of law imposed by the CDCs. Under this scenario, each Afghan adult might be allowed to own and register one gun. Any weapons beyond that must be handed to the CDC for registration and public destruction.

The DDR process has only one serious donor, the Japanese government, which provides \$35 million of the \$51 million committed (the UNDP is seeking supplementary funding of \$80 million which means donors have committed only 40% of the required budget). This is clearly an area where the international community can spread the load. Countries urgently need to commit funds to the task of weapons management, if they are serious about building peace.

A major public awareness effort about disarmament is also needed. Afghanistan’s small but growing civil society can help to shift attitudes and spread accurate information. An excellent opportunity exists to launch a national debate about disarmament strategies and laws, as well as promoting dialogue about the role of private militias and armed security companies. A commission of eminent persons could travel to each province for public discussions on laws to control militias and weapons, obligations and expectations. Such a public debate would help to share information and would change the political climate province by province.

Disarmament is a political process. Disarmament technicians will always fail if the political leadership fails. A decentralised approach to weapons management could buy time during which the power of the warlords could be significantly weakened. Something needs to be done to replace the present chaos of a failed state, where international terrorism and local despotism thrive. In a country that lacks central government authority, a decentralised process of weapons management and the proposed national debate about warlords and militias have some chance of success, but only if there is also serious investment in lasting peace.

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Notes

¹ Françoise Chipaux, *Guns still call the shots in Afghanistan*, *Le Monde*; in English in the *Guardian Weekly*, 1–7 October 2004, p. 21

² *Ibid*

³ Madeleine Albright and Robin Cook, *Unfinished Business*, *International Herald Tribune*, 4 October 2004

■ In Their Own Words

How has the 'war on terror' affected the arms trade in Central Asia?

Barlybai Sadykov Kazakhstan Mission to the United Nations, Geneva

Kazakhstan's counter-terrorism campaign includes a set of steps to counteract the illegal trade in small arms. A new law on export controls provides for licensing rules, the control of small arms exports, and punishment for violations of the law. Kazakhstan was a co-author of the UN General Assembly resolution on small arms, introduced by the OSCE countries in 2003. At the UN regional conference held in the capital Almaty in March 2004, Kazakhstan proposed an initiative to form a regional mechanism of non-proliferation, the Central Asian *Code of Conduct for Strengthening the Control of the Illicit Trade in Small Arms*.

Michael Hall Analyst in the Tajikistan office of the International Crisis Group

It is clear that the Tajik government has taken advantage of the 'war on terror' from time to time. You don't have anything like the absolutely grotesque violations of human rights that you see in Uzbekistan, though the measures used to combat 'extremism' are still pretty brutal. A situation where large parts of the population feel disenfranchised and frustrated, combined with large quantities of weapons, can lead to very serious trouble down the line. It seems like war-weariness is keeping the lid on things for now – people still remember the civil war all too well, but I doubt that's going to last forever.

Dr. Marie-Carin von Gumpenberg
Political Officer at the OSCE Centre, Tashkent

As a result of the events of 11 September 2001, the OSCE has increased its work on improving border controls in Central Asia. The OSCE Centre in Tashkent has held five training programmes in border management for custom officials and border guards. The main objective is to enhance the capacity of border guards and customs officials to search, trace and seize guns illegally trafficked between Uzbekistan and neighbouring countries. The ultimate aim is to reduce the destabilising accumulation and uncontrolled spread of these weapons in the Central Asian region.

Khalil Nasri Afghanistan Mission to the United Nations, Geneva

Since the fall of the Taliban, there are more than 200,000 ex-combatants who need to be disarmed. Up until now, they have relied on their guns to survive. The international community needs to support the DDR process by



Kyrgyz policemen drag away an opposition protester in Bishkek, 16 November 2002. Demonstrators were demanding punishment of government officials guilty of five civilian deaths in March that year.

© Reuters/Vladimir Pirogov

assisting in the creation of sustainable employment opportunities for demobilising troops. One way to achieve this is the rehabilitation of industrial facilities and the revival of long-dormant agricultural projects such as cotton production and forestry. With careful planning and focussed investment, structured environments can be created that minimise the risk of return to the gun.

Allison Gill Researcher in the Uzbekistan office of Human Rights Watch

Uzbekistan is an example of the war on terror gone wrong. The government has used recent political violence in Uzbekistan to justify a renewed crackdown against peaceful religious Muslim dissidents. Government officials justify the criminal prosecution of suspected Islamic 'extremists' by referring to the need to prevent terrorism, even though those prosecuted are not accused of committing any violent act or conspiring to commit such acts. The government has arbitrarily detained hundreds of Muslims and used torture and other illegal methods to coerce evidence used in unfair trials. Under international law, all governments are obliged to protect the rights of the accused and respect the rule of law. Governments cannot limit certain fundamental rights even in times of emergency or because of national security concerns.

■ News in Brief

Gun firms pay out over US snipers, but Congress lets loose assault guns

Four days after the victims of the sniper shootings that terrorised Washington DC two years ago settled a lawsuit for damages, the US Congress and President George W. Bush failed to renew the 1994 federal ban on assault weapons. 'Bull's Eye Shooter Supply', where the rifle used in the shootings was stolen from, agreed to pay USD 2 million to the families of victims who successfully proved that the firm's lax security led to the gun's theft. 'Bushmaster Firearms', who made the gun, agreed to pay USD 0.5 million making this the first time a gun manufacturer in the United States has agreed to pay damages "for negligence leading to the criminal use of a gun," said the victims' lawyer, Dennis Henigan. Given this, it seems additionally regrettable that the US Congress would then chose to lift a ban on the manufacture and distribution of 19 models of military-style assault weapons and weapons with certain features designed for military use.

Sources: www.iansa.org, Washington Post, 10 September 2004

Taylor loyalist recruits Liberians to fight in Guinea

Tragen Wantee, a comrade-in-arms of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, has been recruiting former members of Taylor's armed forces for the past two months in order to launch an insurrection in neighbouring Guinea, former combatants in the frontier town of Ganta have said. The reports of clandestine recruitment have surfaced at a time when many former combatants are complaining that UN peacekeepers are refusing to register them for DDR because they have no weapon to hand in. The United Nations estimated last year that Liberia's three factions together had about 38,000 combatants who were likely to come forward for disarmament. However, more than 72,000 have been registered so far. Fewer than one in three reporting for DDR have handed in a gun highlighting the need for flexible entry requirements to accommodate the reality of the many boys, girls and women who became combatants and who need to be a part of the DDR programme.

Source: IRIN News, 22 September 2004

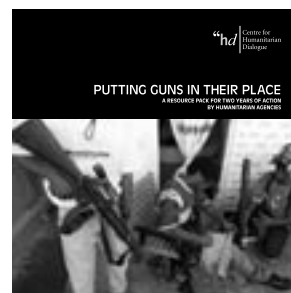
'Brandon's Arms' update

Brandon Maxfield, the US teenager failed in his brave bid to buy the gun company responsible for producing the faulty weapon that led to his paralysis ten years ago. Brandon wanted to shut down Bryco Arms, one of America's leading makers of the inexpensive guns known as 'Saturday night specials'. In 2003 a California judge ruled that Bryco deliberately designed the gun so that it could not be unloaded unless its safety trigger was *switched off*. Maxfield was awarded USD 50.9 million in compensation and instead of paying Maxfield, Bryco Arms declared bankruptcy. Brandon had hoped to buy the 'bankrupt' company and destroy its stock of over 75,000 partly assembled guns.

Source: Associated Press, 12 August 2004. See also www.brandonsarms.org

New publication from the Centre: "Putting guns in their place: A resource pack for two years of action by humanitarian agencies"

In October, the Centre launched a new publication, described by Jan Egeland, the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as "a real resource for turning words into action." The Centre developed this publication specifically to provide humanitarian agencies with an accessible guide for tackling this issue as we believe that this community can be particularly instrumental in shaping the agenda for action in the coming years. *'Putting guns in their place'* is available in English, French and Spanish, and provides an overview of areas for action related to the impacts of weapons misuse – public health, forced displacement, protection of children, gender rights, taking weapons out of circulation and the safety of relief workers – including questions to include in project design or evaluation. An introduction to the UN Programme of Action on small arms and existing processes and instruments regulating weapons transfers is also offered. Hard copies can be mailed to you upon request, simply e-mail us and let us know.



Tip of the Hat



Congratulations to the combined efforts of Brazilian NGOs Viva Rio and Sou de Paz, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice and the Federal Police, thanks to which thousands of Brazilians have handed in some 172,000 weapons and counting!

Since the 15th of July, a weapons buy back has been underway as part of the nations sweeping new guns laws. Already, way above the target of 80,000 weapons by the end of December, the process is provoking nation-wide media coverage and debate. In October 2005, Brazilians will speak their minds in a referendum to gauge public opinion about whether to ban gun sales to civilians. In a country where 36,000 people a year lose their lives due to gun violence, we applaud such a bold and promising initiative. The campaign was recently awarded a UNESCO prize for its efforts.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to dialogue on humanitarian issues, the resolution of violent conflict and the alleviation of its impacts on people. The Centre facilitates high-level, low-key dialogue amongst principal actors to armed conflict as well as other stakeholders such as NGOs and UN agencies.

This work is complemented by research and policy efforts to advance action on contemporary humanitarian challenges such as the nature of non-state armed groups, mediation techniques, war economies, the rule of law and arms availability. In 2001 the Centre established the Human Security and Small Arms Programme which undertakes a variety of projects aimed at furthering understanding about the human cost of weapons availability and misuse, as well as advocating options for action.

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
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bulletin
Small Arms and Human Security

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