

Executive Summary

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A National Survey of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Côte d'Ivoire

Arms Control and Armed Violence Prevention before the Post-electoral Crisis

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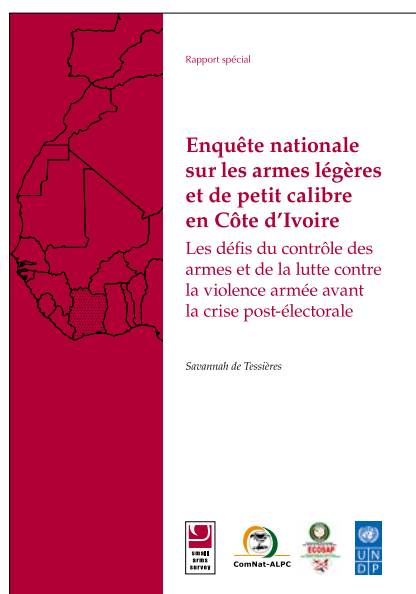
Sub-regional instability, conflict, the emergence of armed groups, the deterioration of law and order, and armed criminality have all contributed to the proliferation and illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons in Côte d'Ivoire. The presence of a substantial number of weapons means that violent incidents now have much more serious consequences. Conscious of this threat to peace and security, the Ivorian authorities decided to act. Working through the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation and Illicit Circulation of Small Arms—with the support of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Small Arms Control Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Small Arms Survey—they initiated a research project to analyse all aspects of small arms and light weapons in Côte d'Ivoire.

The purpose of this study is to help formulate a national plan of action to combat the proliferation, circulation, and illegal use of small arms and light weapons. As the title indicates, the research was carried out before the post-electoral crisis of 2010–11. The report's findings are, however, as relevant today as when the survey was conducted. Its principal findings are as follows:

1) Armed violence

■ **Although the number of victims of armed violence is still too high, the figure seems to have decreased since the end of the armed conflict and the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA).**

Compared to the conflict period, armed violence in early 2010 was apparently less



intense while its incidence declined. Data compiled by the national police reveals that between 2006 and 2009, the government-held zone experienced a 12 per cent reduction in crime and a 50 per cent drop in armed offences. Although the feeling of insecurity is still widespread, almost half the respondents of the household survey conducted in February 2010 reported that the security situation had improved since 2009.

■ **The types of armed violence in Côte d'Ivoire are characteristic of post-conflict countries.**

The armed conflict and the years of crisis that followed have had a devastating effect on the development of the country and on the livelihood and security of the population. Weak law and order, stunted economic development, and the proliferation of arms—all common in post-conflict settings—have encouraged banditry. Highway robberies are particularly

frequent and can be extremely violent, leaving many victims injured or killed. Committed by groups, armed sexual violence is sometimes a feature of such attacks, especially in the west of the country, where the country's various types of armed violence are particularly concentrated.

Tensions surrounding issues of ethnic or national identity and the related problems of access to resources fuelled the Ivorian conflict. The outbreak of war led to the displacement of large numbers of people and the occupation of their land by others. When the armed conflict came to an end, many people returned to the land they used to cultivate before the conflict, which has led to serious tensions and to land disputes that are sometimes violent. Although the west and south-west of the country are particularly prone to this form of violence, there are tensions over land management throughout the territory, such as between farmers and herdsmen in the savannah regions, which sometimes degenerate into armed violence.

The relative peace that Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed after the signing of the OPA in 2007 was shattered by the violent disturbances that broke out in February 2010, following the dissolution of the government and the independent Ivorian Electoral Commission. The tensions surrounding the electoral process, which were evident throughout the pre-election period, led to an upsurge in armed violence starting the day after the presidential election in November 2010. The security sector was particularly affected by the conflict and the political crisis; it remains divided and suffers from many operational and structural deficiencies.

■ **The perpetrators of armed violence are relatively young men.**

According to statistics from Abidjan’s Centre for Detention and Correction (where more than 40 per cent of convicted prisoners have committed a violent or armed robbery), almost 97 per cent of the inmates in 2009 were men, the majority of whom were 25 to 35 years old, and more than 75 per cent were citizens of Côte d’Ivoire. The same proportions apply to suspects brought to court by the national police in 2009.

■ **The use of weapons varies according to the type of violent acts committed.**

Although this study focuses more on firearms, the violence committed with other weapons must not be underestimated: 57 per cent of patients admitted to university hospitals in Abidjan following acts of armed violence in 2008 and 2009 had been wounded by a bladed weapon. Whereas brawls and robbery (excluding hold-ups and highway robberies) usually involve bladed weapons, highway criminals tend to use firearms, and predominantly assault rifles. The proportion of hold-ups involving the use of assault rifles is particularly high in the Centre Nord Ouest (CNO) zone.

2) Weapon holders

■ **The various weapon holders possess a range of small arms and light weapons.**

The types of arms held by state security forces—the Forces de défense et de sécurité, or FDS—and by armed groups are quite similar, as is the case in other countries of the sub-region (see Table 1).

■ **The presence of the militias constitutes a serious security threat.**

In spite of official efforts to disarm and demobilize them, the ‘self-defence groups’ of the south and west are still intact and armed. The multitude of armed young men without legitimate employment clearly fuels armed banditry, which is rife in the west of the country.

■ **During the crisis, the private security sector expanded significantly and without restrictions.**

More than 400 private security companies currently employ more than 50,000 people. This sector, a financial boon to many, is not subject to any effective regulation. Most of the companies possess firearms

Table 1 Summary of available information on weapon holders

Type of holder	Number of holders	Types of weapons	Details
Militia	About 40,000	Small arms and light weapons	75 weapons per 100 combatants
Private security companies	400 firms	Small-calibre weapons and weapons that can fire rubber bullets	n/a
Dozos (traditional hunters)	42,000	Shotguns and handmade guns	32,000 weapons, of which 10,000 are handmade
Civilians		Small arms and light weapons	2,500 weapon permits issued between 1989 and 2009; more than 300 requests for permits submitted in 2009
FDS	About 50,000	Small arms and light weapons and other conventional arms	n/a
Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN) (northern Côte d’Ivoire)	33,000	Small arms and light weapons and other conventional arms	n/a

illegally, including handguns and pump-action shotguns. The authorities have begun to take steps to regulate the sector, but the statutory provisions are still far from rigorously enforced.

■ **Civilian arms possession is widespread and is justified in terms of subsistence, protection, and tradition.**

In contrast with other countries in the region, where the vast majority of the population regards weapons as a source of danger, one-half of the individuals surveyed perceive weapons as a means of protection rather than a source of danger. Weapons possession, which appears to have been widespread before the crisis, seems to have become even more pervasive once weapons that had been used in the conflict flooded the market. Today many civilians own weapons, most of them illegally. Their perception of insecurity feeds the desire to own a weapon. The type of weapon held varies according to the location; whereas hunting rifles are the quintessential rural weapon, people living in towns are more likely to acquire handguns.

■ **The FDS is hampered by insufficient weapons and poor stockpile management.**

The FDS itself has acknowledged a need for more firearms and ammunition, especially for the police, which still uses assault rifles to protect the population. Their stockpiles are held in inadequate conditions and are poorly managed; the crisis seriously damaged the existing stockpile management system.

■ **The reunification of the army will involve a great deal of work before stockpiles can be held securely and managed appropriately.**

The stockpile management system of the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN) is fragile. The serial numbers of many weapons have been erased, which makes rigorous arms control difficult. The establishment of a marking process is essential.

3) Sources and transfers of arms and ammunition

■ **As is the case in the other countries of the sub-region, the sources of Côte d’Ivoire’s arms have moved east.**

The types of weapons in Côte d’Ivoire reflect international historical and political changes. Many weapons owned by the FDS and the various armed groups are French-made—given the country’s long history of military cooperation with France—or were produced in the countries of the former Soviet Union. As in the other countries of the sub-region, the types of weapons in Côte d’Ivoire have changed. NATO-calibre weapons made in NATO countries were replaced by weapons from former Warsaw Pact members following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, when stockpiles from former Soviet states flooded the global market. More recently, the influx of ‘new’ weapons, such as those manufactured in China, have begun to reshape the weapons landscape; Chinese-made AK-type assault rifles are present in Côte d’Ivoire.

■ **The conflict brought about a redistribution of Ivorian weapons holdings.**

The two years preceding the imposition of the arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire in 2004 represent a significant phase in the redistribution of the country's weapons holdings. It was during this period that the rebellion began and the rebels obtained their arms. In response to the conflict, the government—with the support of various commercial partners—organized a sweeping buyback programme and subsequently distributed assault rifles to the police as well as to customs and coast and forestry guards, who are still using them today. At the same time, militias were created, armed, and provided with military training. Eventually, the prevailing climate of insecurity led to a rapid expansion of the private security sector and prompted many individuals to arm themselves to ensure their own safety.

■ **In spite of the ECOWAS Agreement and the imposition of the embargo, arms transfers of various sizes continue to arrive in Côte d'Ivoire.**

Small quantities of weapons and ammunition are still being smuggled across the border into Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian border control system and cooperation with neighbouring states remain inadequate.

The imposition of the embargo has stimulated the development of the black market. According to reports of the United Nations Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire, the FAFN recently received transfers from abroad. These reports also show that the FDS tried to compensate for their lack of weapons and ammunition by trying to import arms without complying with the exemption procedures of the embargo. Finally, the post-election political crisis and the violently contested ballot results suggest that new arms acquisitions will take place in breach of the embargo.

■ **Poor management and difficulties in securing stockpiles increase the risk of diversion and accidents.**

The past few years have seen several incidents of theft from and explosions in the stockpiles in the government and CNO zones. At the civilian level, private security companies do not monitor their weapons holdings and security measures for weapons storage by private individuals are not included in Ivorian legislation, contrary to the ECOWAS Agreement.

■ **The dynamic handmade weapons sector must be brought under control.**

Côte d'Ivoire has no industrial arms or ammunition factories, but craftsmen produce weapons throughout the territory, especially in the savannah regions, which are suitable for hunting. The regulation of the sector is not enforced and the craftsmen work outside the law. Handmade weapons are a genuine subsistence tool for many inhabitants, but they are sometimes used in acts of armed violence.

4) Effects of the illicit circulation and use of weapons

■ **Young men are the principal victims.**

Hospital data shows that, compared to the rest of the population, 25- to 34-year-old men are most frequently admitted for injuries inflicted during acts of armed violence. It also seems that people in certain lines of work—such as tradesmen and drivers—are more likely to be victims of armed violence than others.

■ **In 2010, the extent and types of armed violence were similar across the government and CNO zones.**

The 2010 survey shows that a similar proportion of households in the government and in the CNO zones reported on at least one case of victimization in the 12 months prior to the survey. Respondents in both zones described the same types of armed violence.

■ **The perception of insecurity severely inhibits individual development.**

When asked about the main difficulties they encounter, survey respondents cited insecurity as one of their principal concerns, alongside basic needs such as access to water and electricity. This perception affects people's professional activities and their freedom of movement; it also damages social cohesion by exacerbating distrust between communities. The sense of insecurity varies according to location and time of day; people report being most afraid when moving around and at night.

■ **The perception of insecurity may exacerbate the demand for arms.**

Almost 40 per cent of respondents would like to own a weapon in order to protect themselves; however, the presence of arms in their locality negatively affects their perception of the level of security.

■ **The illicit use of weapons has a devastating impact on the health and livelihood of individuals.**

As a result of the crisis, the health system has deteriorated and access to care is more difficult. Injuries caused by assault rifles are the most lethal. Medical care is very expensive, prohibitively so for some victims. Injuries can have long-term physical and psychological after-effects that jeopardize the economic survival of the home.

■ **At the community and national levels, armed violence impedes recovery from the crisis and hampers economic development.**

For Ivorian society, the social and economic costs of the illicit use of weapons is high: loss of foreign investment, a moribund tourism sector, high protection costs for goods carriers—which affect prices and render Ivorian products much less competitive—and a serious erosion of social cohesion.

5) Measures

■ **The strategy set out in the OPA for overcoming the crisis must be put into effect.**

This study shows that without political stability and a return to peace, various programmes to reduce arms proliferation in Côte d'Ivoire have little chance of being sustainably implemented.

■ **Disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation programmes alone cannot bring about a reduction in arms proliferation.**

The small number of weapons collected so far implies that other initiatives will have to be developed to combat arms proliferation and armed violence. In addition to targeting the presence of weapons, these programmes should address risk factors and the effects of armed violence, while also encouraging community cohesion and economic development.

■ **Since a large part of the population sees weapons as a means of protection, disarmament must be included in a comprehensive strategy to bring about a tangible improvement in security.**

In particular, the capabilities of the FDS and the people's confidence in the security institutions must be strengthened. Tensions are rife, leading many people to

support a strategy of simultaneous disarmament of all communities as a condition of any disarmament. Financial motives are also important for those surveyed, many of whom expect to be compensated for any weapon they hand in. Voluntary disarmament is preferable to a compulsory approach; confidence between communities and between the population and the FDS remains fragile, and too repressive a disarmament process risks giving rise to violent reactions. Finally, it is notable that 17 per cent of those surveyed would prefer not to disarm at all, but to keep their weapons.

■ **Conventional measures to promote post-conflict security could be supported by 'community security' programmes.** The key principles shaping the content and form of community security programmes should respond to the security and social realities of Ivorian communities: declining social cohesion, difficult relations between the population and the FDS, distrust between communities, security problems linked to economic development needs, the importance of local and traditional authorities in the lives of inhabitants, and general interest levels in community development programmes. Moreover, targeted community security programmes should accommodate local realities; certain regions and localities are much more affected by armed violence than others.

■ **In order to create suitable programmes, it is essential to encourage the systematic collection of data.** This study highlights the existence of a large number of institutional databases that can facilitate an understanding of the extent of armed violence and its effects; however, the gaps in the data collection system must also be addressed. If the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation and Illicit Circulation of Small Arms is to increase its knowledge and assess its past work, it must be able to coordinate the compilation of certain data, especially in relation to crime and health.

■ **After more than ten years of crisis, the security and defence system suffers from structural and operational weaknesses that require attention.** Security sector reform is one of the key factors in the fight against insecurity and the illicit circulation of firearms. The division of the country, the crisis, and the lack of logistical resources have

had harmful effects on the ability of the FDS to protect the population and on the administration of justice. The reform of law and order must focus not only on the reunification of the country's security forces, but also on a restructuring of the forces and a redefinition of their roles. Finally, this reform must also take account of the judicial and penal institutions and the role of private security actors in the sphere of law and order.

■ **The enforcement of weapons legislation has been seriously impeded by the conflict and the ongoing crisis in Côte d'Ivoire.** The authorities of the government and CNO zones do not enforce firearms legislation. The effective redeployment of the government and reunification of the FDS remain key stages in achieving better enforcement of the law. The system of issuing

weapons permits must be simplified and decentralized.

■ **Ivorian legislation does not meet normative international standards regarding small arms and light weapons.** Although the country has specific legislation, a number of gaps in the law still need to be bridged. There is a particular need to integrate provisions on tracing, marking, and managing stockpiles, which the ECOWAS Agreement considers vital.

■ **Civilians have a poor understanding of their rights and duties in relation to the possession of weapons. Efforts should be made to raise their awareness in this respect.** Campaigns to raise public awareness are excellent tools, enabling populations to be directly involved in efforts to combat the illicit proliferation, circulation, and use of arms. ■

Full report (in French): www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/C-Special-reports/SAS-SR14-CoteIvoire.pdf

