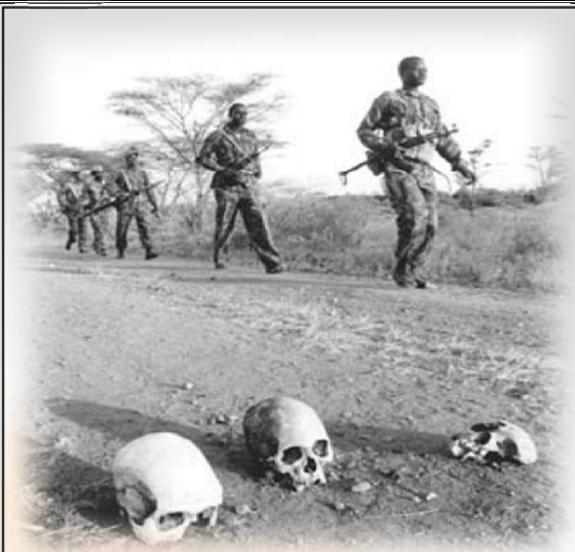




Africa- Arms Trade

The wicked draw their swords and bend their bows to bring down the weak and the needy, to slaughter those whose way is right. Psalm 37:14



The Cost of Conflict

In Africa the consequence of a poorly regulated arms trade has been the proliferation of weapons. This has happened for three reasons. Because weapons and ammunition are illegally imported. Secondly, because weapons imported legally are then illicitly diverted either within countries or across borders to neighbouring states. Finally because exporting countries have irresponsibly exported arms into areas where there is a high risk that they will be misused.

In Africa this illicit trade is mainly limited to light weapons such as assault rifles, machine guns, mortars and grenades. These have caused an alarming increase in casualties and helped to sustain and fuel conflicts across the Continent. It is estimated that there are 100 million small arms weapons in Africa of which the AK47 is by far the most popular example. This weapon can be purchased for as little as \$6, or traded for a sack of grain in some places. In 1999 the Red Cross estimated that in the Somali capital of Mogadishu the city's 1.3 million residents possessed over a million guns.

The easy availability of high velocity weapons has multiplied destruction in terms of lives, injuries and the dislocation of populations. The recent UNHCR "Global Trends Report" shows how during 2011 conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia and Sudan forced more than 800,000 people into neighbouring countries and internally displacing a further 3.5 million within the borders of their own countries.

In monetary terms it is estimated that armed conflicts cost Africa €18 billion a year.

The Need for Internationally binding Regulation

There are internationally binding Trade Agreements regarding atomic weapons, chemical weapons and even food commodities. Incredibly no set of internationally agreed standards exist to ensure that conventional arms are exported or transferred for appropriate use. Yet it is weapons such as tanks, artillery guns and especially light weapons (assault rifles, machine guns, mortars and grenades) that fuel and maintain wars, conflicts and crime all around the world. The largely unregulated global trade in conventional arms has an appalling cost that includes the deaths of 750,000 people per year with many more being maimed and injured.

Some regional agreements regulating the transfer of arms do exist but in the words of one UN official "the current patchwork of controls is simply not adequate." Weapons are being illicitly transferred and misused. They are frequently diverted into illegal markets or resold to other countries ending up in the hands of criminals, gangs, war lords and terrorists. The existence of this situation has made it clear that comprehensive internationally binding rules and criteria to be used in guiding decisions regarding the transfer of arms need to be drawn up. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is an attempt to do this.

The Arms Trade Treaty - July 2012

Preparations and negotiations to draw up globally agreed rules began in 2006. This process reaches its culmination in July 2012 when the 193 UN member states meet to formulate an agreed, internationally binding Arms Trade Treaty. To effectively reduce the terrible human cost caused by the proliferation of arms most UN countries agree that the proposed treaty needs to be strong. They agree that it must:

- Apply to all categories and transfers of conventional weapons and ammunition.
- Ensure that there are no loopholes by covering all types of transfers, including activities such as transit, trans-shipment, as well as loans and leases.
- Require States to assess the risk that serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law may be committed with the weapons being transferred (the Treaty should specify criteria for such an assessment).
- Finally, to be effective, the Treaty must have provisions for reporting, transparency, accountability and enforcement.

Opposing views and vested interests

Negotiating the terms of the Arms Trade Treaty will be contentious as there is some opposition to the strong binding treaty that most nations want.

It is expected that the world's six top arms-producing nations, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany will, in various ways, attempt to water down



A UN Peacekeeper dismantles AK47 Magazines.

the treaty's provisions during the July Conference at the UN. It is likely that Russia and China will not want the Treaty to include binding rules on international human rights thus removing any requirement for exporting countries to assess the risk of arms being misused. Effectively this would leave the ability to pay as the only deciding criterion when transferring arms.

US officials also want minimal restrictions on the transfer of arms even when credible evidence of their potential use for violations of human rights exists. They want to exclude ammunition under the scope of the Treaty. This, if agreed, would be disastrous for Africa where the easy availability of ammunition for light arms is fuelling and sustaining conflicts. The US favours a weak Treaty with general principles that "take into account," rather than strong binding requirements and provisions.

It is not yet clear what position Britain, France or Germany will adopt but they will certainly be under pressure from the US and no doubt will also give consideration to their diplomatic and trade relations with Russia and China. Whether or not the Treaty will be weak or robust remains to be seen. The scope of its success or failure will depend on whether or not the arms producing nations succeed or fail in getting their way at the UN Conference in July.

National and Regional arms issues

While a robust Treaty would go a long way in regulating the international weapons trade it will not solve all the arms proliferation problems. For example in Africa the issues of corruption, poorly managed arms stockpiles and the illicit diversion of legally bought weapons by governments to neighbouring countries must also be addressed both nationally and regionally in order to save lives and to reduce conflict.

The Church View

Addressing the fourth session of the Arms Trade Treaty Preparatory Committee in Feb. 2012 the Holy See's representative at the UN identified respect for the dignity of the human person as the Treaty's founding principle. He stated that the principle objective of the Treaty should not just be the regulation of the conventional arms trade but "above all, the disarming of the international illicit market".

The Church calls for a strong, effective and credible Treaty that is capable of regulating and improving transparency in the trade of all categories of conventional weapons, small arms and their respective munitions, including the trading and licensing of technologies for their production.

To be effective the Treaty must also include provisions for transparent reporting, accountability and enforcement. It must also have mechanisms for reviewing and updating the Treaty that are capable of quickly incorporating new developments. Without such provisions and powers the Treaty will fail.

"For the Church the Arms Trade Treaty can make an important contribution to the promotion of a true culture of peace... justice, stability and prosperity in the world."



Turkana tribesmen display their AK 47's

Peace is more than the absence of violence

Based in Nairobi Fr's Patrick Devine and Oliver Noonan SMA work with the **Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (SCCRR)** which aims to contribute to peace building efforts in Kenya and in surrounding countries. A basic principle of their work is that understanding the root causes of conflicts is a necessary first step in resolving them. By researching and analysing conflict causes the Shalom Centre develops a programme aimed at leading conflicting parties to a situation where they become mutually interested in creating the harmony and cooperation needed for peace and reconciliation.

In the borderlands of Northern Kenya the Centre has encountered long-standing violent conflicts between different predominantly cattle rearing communities. For example in 2011 members of the Dassenach ethnic group attacked and killed thirty-eight Turkana people. The causes of conflicts like this are complex. They include *Ethnicity* and *Tribalism* as well as competition for scarce water and grazing resources. The lack of border security, the lack of State investment in the region and the pervasive belief that killing or taking revenge is legitimate are also significant causes. Finally, the presence of outsiders with their own competing interests in the pastoral borderlands gives further cause for conflict.

Add into this volatile mixture the ease with which firearms and ammunition change hands across borders as well as within Kenya, it is easy to see why conflict is produced and reproduced in a cycle of violence and revenge. In the past, disputes and conflicts were settled with traditional weapons and negotiation. Today automatic weapons are used. As a result injuries and the loss of life are much greater making the likelihood of negotiation much less. **While illicit weapons do not in themselves cause conflicts they multiply, sustain and fuel the cycle of violence.**

To promote Peace and Reconciliation the Shalom Centre trains local people in the skills of conflict management. Using the results of research into root causes SCCR develops problem solving workshops for local people and community leaders. The Shalom Centre believes that peace is not merely the absence of violence. Reconciliation must also be part of the process for only then can the Justice that will make Peace sustainable exist.

