

# Small Arms and Peacekeeping

## **Small arms interfere with peacekeeping missions because:**

- **Small arms increase the possibility of outbreak of conflicts in areas of crisis**
- **Small arms endanger the safety of both international peacekeepers and the local population**
- **Destabilizing accumulations of small arms hinder lasting conflict resolution**

Small arms affect all stages of a peacekeeping operation, from its inception to its implementation and conclusion. Even after peace accords are signed and peacekeeping missions approved, small arms violence often makes it impossible for such operations to begin or for peacekeepers to do their job. For example, deployment of the original UN peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was considerably delayed due to continued fighting on the ground. In June 2003, 1,400 more peacekeeping troops, led by France, were sent to augment troops already in place because of small arms violence between Hema and Lendu militias in Bunia, DRC.

Not only are peacekeeping missions at risk from small arms use, but so are the soldiers and civilian officials sent to conflict zones to implement these missions. The United Nations has determined that small arms and light weapons pose the principal threat to troops seeking to establish or maintain peace among combatants. Since the inception of UN peacekeeping, in 1948, over 2,240 peacekeepers have been killed while serving on UN missions, many of them with small arms and light weapons.

Increasingly since the mid-1990s, peacekeeping troops and local UN employees have been targeted and killed in places as diverse as Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. The threat of small arms violence to peacekeepers is increasing over time, with

many more peacekeepers killed during more recent missions. Of the seven years in which more than 100 peacekeepers died, one was 1961, three were in the 1990s, and three came in the first five years of the new century.

Some missions have been particularly hard-hit. For example, peacekeepers in Haiti have suffered 13 fatalities, many from encounters with heavily armed former army and police officers. At one point, heavily armed rebels in Sierra Leone held more than 500 UN peacekeepers captive for several weeks. In Angola, three UN operations in a row failed in large part because of rebels' easy access to small arms and light weapons.

Some UN peacekeeping operations are mandated to address the presence and proliferation of small arms. Mandates can include tasks such as the comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and reintegration of armed groups; close monitoring of the supply of war-related materiel to the field for peacekeepers; targeting organized crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism; and providing public security crisis management. To fulfill such missions in former war zones awash in weapons, peacekeepers must use the resources needed for post-conflict peace-building to combat the myriad problems that accompany rampant small arms proliferation.