

NOTE

## **Small Arms, Immense Harm**

**B D writes :**

Every year 16 billion bullets are manufactured, more than two bullets for each human being on the earth.

Every year around 8 million new arms are manufactured, but even more significant is the movement of second-hand guns.

Although more attention is generally devoted to heavy weapons, in practice frequently even more destruction is caused by "small arms and light weapons", a technical term (generally abbreviated to 'small arms') which covers revolvers, pistols, rifles, carbines, machine-guns, ammunition, shells, grenades, landmines and explosives.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said (in year 2000), "The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as 'weapons of mass destruction. Yet there is still no global non-proliferation regime to limit their spread."

Amnesty International and Oxfam say in a recent report titled 'Shattered Lives', "More injuries, deaths, displacements, rapes, kidnappings and acts of torture are inflicted or perpetrated with small arms than with any other type of weapon. ...There are approximately 639 million small arms in the world today. Nearly 60% of small arms are in civilian hands."

The World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH) prepared by the World Health Organisation, says, "Firearms are an important risk factor in many types of violence, including youth and collective violence and suicide." In this case, technological 'improvements' have mostly added to the destructiveness of weapons. As the WRVH says, "The ability to fire more bullets, more quickly, and with greater range and accuracy, has greatly increased the potential destructive power of such weapons." An AK-47 fires up to 30 rounds in less than three seconds with each bullet potentially lethal at distances exceeding one km.

Recently some hope has emerged for checking the proliferation of small arms in the form of a number of international disarmament treaties.

Over one hundred countries have supported the recent convention to ban cluster bombs, the earlier Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines and the under-negotiation Arms Trade Treaty to regulate arms trade. Millions of people have joined these campaigns. This has created new hope for saving millions of lives. □□