



UNRIC

United Nations
Regional Information Centre
for Western Europe

To illustrate the devastating effects of the illegal arms trade,

The United Nations presents:

Dealing and Wheeling in Small Arms

A documentary by Sander Francken



Making of the Documentary

In 2001 director and producer Sander Francken was commissioned by the Dutch government to make a documentary of a Dutch financed small arms collection and destruction program in Cambodia, a country that had been flooded by small arms during 35 years of civil war.

In Phnom Penh, Francken made acquaintance with an international group of disarmament experts, amongst them Henny van der Graaf, a former general in the Dutch army, who made him aware of an urgent global issue. This issue was, and still is, fairly unknown in most parts of the industrialized world: the ongoing legal and illegal spread of small arms – most of them produced in the so-called developed countries and fuelling countless wars in developing countries.

After finishing his documentary on the Cambodian disarmament project, titled **FIGHTING WEAPONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**, Francken went on to study the issue on a global scale. And he soon discovered that the international community had supported the publication of hundreds, maybe even thousands of research reports, studies, books and other written materials on the issue of small arms throughout the last decade. But most of this information never went much further than the same group of experts.

So he decided to produce a film that would reach a wider international audience.



In parallel storylines **DEALING AND WHEELING IN SMALL ARMS** shows how people relate in various ways to arms: arms cherished as collectors-item, small arms used with passion and for a 'feel of power', arms as state-of-the-art design, arms as lucrative trade-off, but also small arms destroying possessions and livelihoods, disrupting families, killing loved-ones. Small arms are part of our culture, power and manliness, but are destroying our human condition.

Small arms – the contemporary weapons of mass destruction – are high on the international political agenda but any wider discussion within the public domain remains absent. As long as the issue of small arms proliferation has not become a subject of public discussion, arms-producing countries will not be compelled to take the steps necessary to reign in the overabundance of small arms worldwide.



What are small arms and light weapons?

Small arms are weapons designed for personal use, while light weapons are designed for use by several persons serving as a crew. Examples of small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine-guns. Light weapons include heavy machine-guns, mortars, hand grenades, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns and portable missile launchers.

While small arms and light weapons are designed for use by armed forces, they have unique characteristics that are of particular advantage for irregular warfare or terrorist and criminal action. Mortars and mounted anti-aircraft guns, for example, allow for highly mobile operations that often cause heavy casualties among civilians if used indiscriminately. The low cost of small arms makes them affordable to actors beyond the State. Small arms require almost no maintenance, so they can essentially last forever. They can be hidden easily, and even young children can use them with minimal training. Small arms and light weapons would not be lethal without their ammunition. Ammunition, explosives and explosive devices form an integral part of small arms and light weapons used in conflicts. Anti-personnel landmines are also considered small arms, but are not being dealt with by the upcoming United Nations conference on small arms as other international forums have taken up those weapons as a separate issue.

What practical steps is the UN taking to help curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons?

In addition to acting as a forum for norm-building in this arena, the United Nations family of organizations carries out a number of practical actions to contribute to the curbing of the proliferation of illicit small weapons and light weapons (SALW). It conducts training workshops, conferences and capacity-building events. These include training law enforcement officials, raising awareness campaigns, and assistance in the area of stockpile management and security as well as assistance for national reporting on the implementation of the Programme of Action. The UN also works with States to design, implement and monitor weapons collection and destruction programmes. In addition, UN experts are dispatched, at the request of an interested State, to gather information, to advise on ways to address national small arms problems and to assist with the establishment and functioning of national commissions on small arms.

In order to coordinate the actions of the various parts of the United Nations family of organizations that deal with the problem of illicit small arms and light weapons and improve the quality of assistance provided to States and affected communities, the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism was established. This body promotes consultations, exchange of information, the development of inter-agency projects and activities and the provision of joint contributions to meetings of States on SALW issues. The mechanism comprises 16 United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes.

Helpful links:

<http://www.iansa.org/un/programme-of-action.htm>

<http://www.un.org/disarmament/>

<http://www.un-casa.org/>

<http://www.unidir.org/>



More than 600 million small arms and light weapons are estimated to be in circulation worldwide. They are directly responsible for the deaths of more than 300,000 people every year through armed conflict, homicides and suicides. The indirect effects of small arms use and availability destabilize regions; spark, fuel and prolong conflicts; obstruct relief programmes; undermine peace initiatives; exacerbate human rights abuses; hamper development; and foster a “culture of violence.”

Statistics

The gun trade

There are about 640 million small arms in the world or one for every ten people on earth. The majority, 59%, are in the hands of civilians. 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups.

The gun trade is worth US\$4 billion a year, of which up to US\$1 billion may be unauthorised or illicit.

Eight million new guns are manufactured every year by at least 1,249 companies in 92 countries.

Ten to 14 billion units of ammunition are manufactured every year, which is enough to kill every person in the world twice over.

Illicit guns start out in the legal trade. 80% of the guns used in crime in Mexico were legally bought in the US, and 72% of the guns used in crime in Rio de Janeiro were once legally owned in Brazil.

Top 3 biggest exporters of guns:

Country Annual value of gun exports

(US \$ millions)

USA 533

Italy at least 250

Brazil 164

Casualties of the gun trade

- A thousand people a day die as a result of guns. Of these 1000 deaths, on average 560 are criminal homicides, 250 are direct war deaths; 140 are suicides, while 50 are accidents or cases of undetermined intent. Three people are wounded for every one killed.
- Small arms are responsible for 60-90% of the direct conflict deaths that occur each year.
- Tens of thousands of children are armed and fighting in more than 20 conflicts around the world.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that for the 18 months after the official end of a conflict, weapons related casualties are 60-80% higher than before the conflict.
- 85 % of firearm homicide victims are under 44, and 90% of gun related homicides occur amongst men.

Source: http://www.iansa.org/campaigns_events/documents/2006/Statistics-2.pdf