

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN PLAN OF ACTION ON SMALL ARMS: PERSPECTIVE BANGLADESH

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In today's world no region is immune to illicit trade and trafficking in small arms and light weapons. Widespread proliferation and easy availability of small arms and light weapons has emerged as a serious concern to the safety and security of the states of the South Asian region and the rest of the globe. There is a close link between small arms and human rights and development since "human security is the prime casualty: about 300,000 people are killed every year in violent conflict and war, with small arms being the main instruments for this death and destruction; 200,000 more people die from gunshots through intentional violence, suicide and accidents".¹ And it is the common people who pay the ultimate price of gun violence.

The global trade in small arms is a big business, which involves almost 1,249 companies operating in at least 92 countries producing weapons, parts or ammunition. One estimate shows that 70-100 million Kalashnikov rifles - comprising the AK-47 and AK-74 - have been made worldwide, dwarfing the US-made M-16 at seven million. The US, UK, France, Russia, and China – the 5 Security Council members are responsible for 88% of reported conventional arms exports. In the US alone, the small arms trade accounts for a huge \$14bn (£8bn) of exports. The figure in the UK is \$4.6bn. Another estimate shows that 'there are 75 million firearms in South Asia, 63 million of which are in civilian hands'.²

In Bangladesh the illicit transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons, their accumulation and proliferation is posing a threat to the lives of the common people. Besides, the alarming rise of the Islamist extremism in the country is threatening the very basis of the Constitution and the sovereignty of the country. This unabated grenade campaign masterminded by HUJI, JMB, JMJB and Hizb-ut Tahrir is making our nascent democratic architecture even more fragile. The

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¹ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2003), *Small Arms and Human Security Bulletin*, Issue 1.

² International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

unprecedented series of simultaneous bomb blasts in the country on August 17, 2005 shows the muscle power of the religious extremists in the country. The message of the incident was very clear; the secular space is shrinking in the country. We are now faced with terrorist assaults with all the flavors of international terror connection. The latest addition to the terrorist network is the public appearance of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Not many people know that Hizb-ut-Tahrir is the political ideologue of all the terrorist groups in the world. International Terror groups are reportedly using Bangladesh territory as the Transit Route (TR) for the global Arms Bazaar. The easy availability and use of explosives and arms like RDX and rifle AK 47 in the attacks is alarming. The biggest-ever arms seizure in Chittagong on April 1-2, 2004 and the subsequent confiscations of arms also signify a new emerging address of international terrorism in Bangladesh, which is causing concern for the international community.³

Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Small Arms in South Asia and Bangladesh

The trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the South Asian region has led to a growth in transnational organized crime and exacerbated internal conflicts, prompting countries to target a common approach to curbing it. But the irony is that many governments still do not take responsibility for the problem of small arms violence within their states and remained inactive in implementing the UN Programme of Action. Countries clearly affected by small arms violence often project blame for their problems solely on foreign arms manufacturers and exporters. On the other hand, weapons' exporters, often among the world's most powerful states, are willing to disregard their own responsibilities to protect inter-national human rights and humanitarian law, and instead are willing to turn a blind eye to atrocity.

As regards Bangladesh, the criminalization of politics, reported political patronization of the terrorists, and intimidations of political opponents and voters during elections are, inter alia, some of the reasons for the incremental rise of a gun culture in the country. It is a matter of grave concern that the religious extremist groups are becoming more and more powerful in the country. The government initiatives for curbing use of illegal small arms should be more comprehensive while civil

³ Bangladesh media