BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) deals with global topics in the field of peace and conflict research.

Problems of organised violence lie at the heart of its Conversion Studies. Its themes range from the (de)mobilisation of violent actors, arms exports and small arms control, to the meaning of organised violence for global migration and the use of natural resources.

BICC carries out trans-disciplinary, applied research, which lays the foundation for its policy advice and contributions to public debates.

The photo exhibition “A CALL FOR ARMS: Community security and arms control in Darfur” is supported by

Soldier, Sudan–Chad Joint Border Forces

The soldier is keeping guard from his position atop a Toyota Land Cruiser, Bir Saliba West Darfur. The Sudanese–Chadian Joint Border Force was established after the rapprochement between Chad and Sudan brought an end to a decade of heavy conflict and proxy wars fought between the two countries.

Additional efforts are underway to establish similar joint forces along the borders shared with Central African Republic and Libya but with little success due to the current political and security environment in the region.

UNAMID CLIPS welding training

The Joint UN–African Union Mission in Darfur provides vocational training to youth at risk of recruitment by armed groups or criminal gangs. Trainings are provided in electrical engineering, vehicle maintenance and welding. This Vocational Training Centre in El Geneina, West Darfur is now supported by a new programme run by GIZ as of July 2015.
The region of Darfur, Sudan, is roughly the size of France. In past decades, civil war and violence have prevented the population from settling in peace. According to the United Nations, approximately 2.7 million people have fled, and an estimated 230,000 people have died in the course of a civil war that has been ongoing since 2003. The causes of the conflict are complex and multifaceted. Aside from political disputes, conflicts have often arisen over access to land and pasture, and in regard to the exploitation of natural resources on the local level.

Weapons are everywhere in Darfur. They are in the hands of rebels, the military of rival clans, and of criminal gangs and smugglers. However members of the local civilian population also own weapons, which are perceived as providing protection against the criminal gangs and parties to the conflict. Many people also feel that the government does not provide sufficient protection; indeed they even sometimes feel actively threatened.

Children playing with large calibre weapons, a blacksmith making amulets that protect against violence—pictures like these clearly show how armed conflicts have entered the very fabric of everyday life of the people in Darfur. Their yearning for life in peace is great. The marking and registration of small arms and light weapons is a first step towards the control of weapons that bring suffering and destruction. Such topics lie at the very heart of the work of the peace and conflict research institute BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion). On behalf of the German Federal Foreign Office, BICC offers technical advice and support to local and national small arms control efforts, particularly in West Darfur.

In its work, BICC supports co-operation between weapons registering committees, traditional leaders of communities, and the area offices of the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC). It is due to such co-operation that more and more community members are willing to have their weapons registered and marked.

In Darfur, BICC also co-operates closely with the United Nations and international aid organisations. The rationale behind this close cooperation is that the registration and marking process must be accompanied by development efforts if the safety of the population is to be improved. Exemplifying this logic, the programmes of UNAMID (United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur) offer jobs to the local population in long-term projects which intend to counter the structural causes of the conflict.

Regular patrols by the Sudan–Chad Joint Border Force established a few years ago have proven to be effective in providing more security in the region. Because of their fight against armed robbers and criminal traffickers, many communities in the border region have been able to resume the transport of their goods and cattle across great distances to various market towns.

The photo exhibition ‘A Call for Arms: Community security and arms control in Darfur’ documents this complex process. The photographer Nikhil Acharya has been working as a BICC Technical Advisor in Sudan since 2013.

Children’s daily lives affected by weapons

Children playing with ammunition casings in El Geneina, West Darfur. The 12.7 x 108mm ammunition pictured here is most frequently used in DSAK ‘Dushka’ machine guns mounted on Toyota Land Cruisers. After several decades of conflict, violence seeps into the very fabric of everyday life, including games played by children.

A Kalashnikov AK47 7.62mm assault rifle being marked

The markers use a Spanish manufactured Glock 9mm pistol. The body of this handgun is made of a polymer. The mark is therefore placed on an essential, metallic section of the weapon. The star sign represents the RECSA region (Regional Center on Small Arms) while SD is the ISO code for Sudan followed by a unique identification number.

A marked example of an Austrian manufactured Glock 9mm pistol

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Sudan–Chad Joint Border Forces soldier

The soldier is manning a Dushka 12.7mm machine gun mounted on a Toyota Land Cruiser at a checkpoint near the Sudanese–Chadian border. He provides security cover to the entrance of the camp of the Joint Forces Command near Sirba. The Forces rotate bases every six months moving between El Geneina, West Darfur and Abeche, Chad.