

bulletin

No. 11

1 April 1999

At Long Last, Action to Address the Plague of Small Arms and Light Weapons

by Edward J. Laurance

In the past few years, the world has become suddenly aware of the human suffering at the hands of a class of weapons previously off the screen of policymakers at all levels—small arms and light weapons. These weapons—hand grenades, assault rifles and the like—were originally designed for use by legitimate military forces. They have now proliferated to such a level that their availability and misuse by criminals, gangs, irregular forces and irresponsible governments has brought massive destruction to many parts of the world. Most of the casualties in today's conflicts are innocent women and children. Human development and human security are all but impossible in areas infested with these weapons.

Fortunately, the international community at all levels has begun to respond. At the international level, policies and legal mechanisms are emerging that begin to provide the norms and framework for action. In the United Nations the General

Assembly approved recommended actions ranging from a code of conduct on arms transfers to the marking of weapons. The United Nations has also begun to provide assistance to those states plagued by excessive and destabilizing levels of this type of weapon. At the regional level, in 1997 the European Union developed the Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms and more recently in December 1998 the Joint Action on Small Arms. These efforts have the twin goals of insuring that weapons of this type manufactured and surplus to military forces in Europe do not proliferate to zones of conflict, as well as assisting those states suffering the consequences of weapons already circulating in such regions. The Organization of American States 1997 Convention on the Illicit Manufacture and Trade in Firearms is a significant step forward in a region that ended most of

its civil wars in the 1990s, only to find that hundreds of thousands of military weapons remained in circulation for use by the enemies of human security and development. In West Africa, Mali has led a coalition of states to declare a moratorium on the export, import and manufacture of small arms and light weapons.

These international actions have begun to provide incentives and impetus for action where it matters most, at the level of national governments. It is governments which must develop and implement those laws and policies which can prevent the proliferation and availability of these weapons, the key to eliminating their misuse. In July 1998, the Norwegian government gathered 21 "like-minded" countries to begin the process of identifying and acting on "Elements of Common Understanding". Germany has led a Group of Interested States in funding projects in affected states which are defined as "practical disarmament" measures. In October 1998, the Belgian government hosted a conference which closed with 98 governments issuing a "Brussels Call for Action on Small Arms."

"Human development and human security are all but impossible in areas infested with Small Arms and Light Weapons"

The successful campaign and signing of a treaty in December 1997 to ban anti-personnel landmines demonstrated the critical role that civil society must play when the proliferation of a class of military weapon creates a

humanitarian crisis. As with anti-personnel landmines, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) most closely associated with the consequences of the proliferation, availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons, has begun to act and organize. Unable to wait for governments and international organizations to act, NGOs have begun to engage in such actions as developing voluntary weapons collection programs at the community level, collecting and destroying tens of thousands of surplus weapons that can no longer circulate, kill and disrupt human development. These zones of conflict have also spawned a wide variety of NGOs which represent victims and remind their governments of their responsibility to stop the violence by dealing with the weapons. Most encouragingly these NGOs have begun to organize at the international level. For over a year NGOs have been developing the

International Action Network on Small Arms, which will launch on May 13 at The Hague Appeal for Peace. Over 150 NGOs representing the full spectrum of activity—human rights, humanitarian relief, advocates for children, development, arms control and disarmament, etc.—have joined together and begun to pool their resources. Their goal is to not only remind governments of their responsibility to solve the problems caused by these weapons, but also to work with governments where it matters most, in the villages and fields where these weapons are doing their damage.

At the local level, there is no distinction between illicit and legal arms, only the unacceptable misuse of these weapons with devastating levels of human suffering and retarded human development. More can and must be done to restore hope to the hundreds of thousands of people who find themselves at the wrong end of an assault rifle, or the victim of a hand grenade attack. Governments can and have begun to act. They need the support, encouragement and pressure from all those who can provide it to meet their responsibilities.

Edward J. Laurance is Professor of International Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, where he also directs the Program for Arms Control, Disarmament and Conversion. He has been closely involved with BICC's work since its foundation in 1994.

For further information on the topic of Small Arms and Light Weapons please refer to the following publications:

report 13: David DeClerq, *Destroying Small Arms: Survey of Methods and Practical Guide*

brief 12: Derek Boothby, *The UNTAES Experience: Weapons Buy-Back in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and West Sirmium*

brief 11: Joseph Di Chiaro III, *Reasonable Measures: Addressing the Excessive Accumulation and Unlawful Use of Small Arms*

brief 7: Edward J. Laurance, *The New Field of Micro-Disarmament: Addressing the Proliferation and Buildup of Small Arms and Light Weapons*

**Bonn International Center for Conversion
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The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and facilitating the processes whereby people, skills, technology, equipment, and financial and economic resources can be shifted away from the defense sector and applied to alternative civilian uses.

This newsletter is published quarterly by
© Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)
An der Elisabethkirche 25, 53113 Bonn, Germany.

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Staff Spotlight:



Herbert Wulf

Herbert Wulf (Germany) has been the director of BICC since it was founded in 1994. In 1993, while he was deputy director of the Institute for Development and Peace at the University of Duisburg, he was tasked to conceptualize and organize the establishment of BICC.

During his 25-year career in research, he has served as a consultant to various governmental bodies and international organizations including the EU Parliament and Commission, the Commission on Global Governance as well as several United Nations agencies. The topics covered a wide range of activities ranging from the establishment of the UN Register of Conventional Arms to the analysis of the 'peace dividend' for the UNDP Human Development Report. His activities concerning the defense industry have ranged from the investigation of job retraining programs in the defense industry for the International Labour Organisation to the cultural dimension of defense industry advertising for UNESCO. His research fields also include development cooperation, development theory and international relations, with a regional focus on South Asia.

He was previously a senior researcher at the University of Hamburg and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). His work concentrates mostly on the practical implementation of disarmament and aims at encouraging good governance, supporting regional and international cooperation, and improving transparency in the field of disarmament and peace. A clear focus of this work is on the role of civil organizations in developing countries and overall assistance in social and economic development programs.

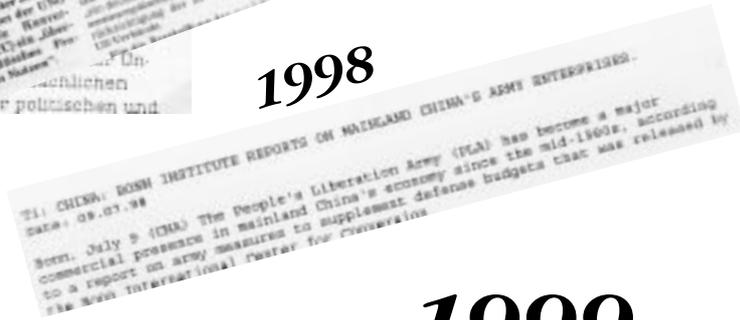
He has published several books and articles in academic journals on these issues. Prior to his work in research, he was the deputy director of the German Development Service in India. When not busy at BICC, Herbert can often be seen roller-blading along the banks of the Rhine and Elbe.

→ For further information please contact
Herbert Wulf at wulf@bicc.uni-bonn.de



5 Years BICC

Serving disarmament for 5 years
The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) celebrates the anniversary of its foundation



1999

Within the framework of the opening of the BICC exhibition *ConverArt – The Art of Disarmament* in Bonn on 5 March around 200 people joined the staff and members of the board in celebrating BICC's anniversary. In his speech Dr. Traugott Schoefthaler, Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO, congratulated BICC on becoming an associate member of the German UNESCO Commission. He expressed his hope that *ConverArt* and the info-exhibition will be shown at the UNESCO's General Assembly in Paris in autumn 1999.



Besides congratulating BICC staff on their successful work, Anke Brunn, chair of BICC's International Board, called upon the German federal government to foster BICC's activities. In her speech, Dorothee Paß-Weingartz, Mayor of Bonn, said that Bonn can be proud of BICC because it is an institution which gives important stimulus to one of the fundamental topics of society's future which is disarmament and the achievement of peace. She said that it is an enormous achievement that BICC has distinguished itself in such a short time and evolved into a focal point for international conversion.

For five years now, the Bonn International Center for Conversion has been working as an independent non-profit organization on the conversion of former military assets for civilian purposes. To tackle the questions of conversion and disarmament, to analyze them on the basis of scientific research, to convey the necessary information and to give advice to the actors, in short, the management of disarmament, is BICC's job. To use the chances offered by disarmament and to simultaneously help avoid the negative effects, or lessen them is the decisive framework of the Center's activities. As certified by many external organizations, the Bonn International Center for Conversion has been successful in facilitating the conversion process at all levels—local, national and global. Its rising reputation in the field of conversion is evidence of its excellent work. In projects based on practical work, consulting services, with its publications, conferences, reports, background studies and its function as a clearinghouse, the Center has proven that conversion does improve the chances for human development.

For further information please contact
 → Michael Dedek at dedek@bicc.uni-bonn.de

BICC Publications

In addition to its annual *conversion survey* and other books, BICC publishes series such as *reports*, *briefs*, and *papers* which analyze the international conversion process, report on conversion projects and experiences, and offer scientific as well as practical know-how. Recent and forthcoming publications include:

report 13: David DeClerq, *Destroying Small Arms: Survey of Methods and Practical Guide*, April 1999

brief 14: Yudit Kiss, *The Transformation of the Defense Industry in Hungary*, April 1999

Conversion Survey 1999. Global Disarmament, Demilitarization and Demobilization, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, June 1999

Upcoming Events

Ninth Annual International Arms Control Conference: Entering the New Millennium: Dilemmas in Arms Control Albuquerque, 16–18 April 1999. Contact: Martha Lucero at mlucero@sandia.gov

African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers organized by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers International Secretariat, Maputo, 19–22 April 1999. Contact: child.soldiers@wanadoo.fr

7th Annual International Conference on Conflict Resolution Sharing Tools for Personal/Global Harmony, sponsored by Common Bond Institute (USA) & HARMONY Institute (RUSSIA), in cooperation with Association for Humanistic Psychology, St. Petersburg, 6–16 May 1999. Contact Steve Olweean or Sandra Friedman at solweean@aol.com

International Academic Congress: NATO - The First Fifty Years, From 'Security in the West' to 'Securing Peace in Europe', Brussels and Bonn, 19–22 May 1999. Contact: Prof. Dr. Gustav Schmidt at gustav.schmidt@ruhr.uni-bochum.de or Prof. Jack L. Granatstein at jlgranat@civilisations.ca

International Conference: The Arms Trade, Security and Conflict, organized by the Arms Trade Research Group (University of Surrey, Birbeck College, and Middlesex University), London, 1–12 June 1999. Contact: Francisco Moraiz at f.moraiz@surrey.ac.uk

The International CW Demil Conference, co-sponsored by DERA (Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—a branch of the British MoD) and ICF Kaiser (an international environmental and engineering consulting company), Vienna, 7–9 June 1999. Contact: Fiona Maw at marcoms@dera.gov.uk

BICC Notes

On 18 through 20 February, Herbert Wulf attended a workshop on small arms in Geneva, Switzerland. His contribution to the session dealing with possible reduction measures was a presentation on *Destruction of Small Arms*.

→ For further information please contact Herbert Wulf at wulf@bicc.uni-bonn.de

On 10 March 1999, BICC hosted a seminar on *Small Arms, Disarmament and Demobilization: the Response of Development Organizations*. In this informal seminar, some European development NGOs exchanged experiences on how the development community is dealing with the interplay between development assistance and security issues. BICC staff presented overviews of issues such as the collection and control of small arms, external support to demobilization, crisis prevention through capacity building, and the concept of peace-building.

→ For further information please contact Kees Kingma at kingma@bicc.uni-bonn.de

During March, BICC participated in two international conferences. From 11–12 March, the Foreign Ministry and the National Defence College in Sweden hosted a conference on the *Removal of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Context of Peace Missions*. BICC researcher Sami Faltas presented a paper on weapons collection and disposal. The World Bank Experts' Meeting on *Microdisarmament, Security and Development: Does the World Bank Have a Role?* was held in Washington D.C. from 18–20 March.

→ For further information please contact Sami Faltas at faltas@bicc.uni-bonn.de

On 22 March, BICC, along with several NGOs and research institutes, organized a seminar in Bonn. The seminar, attended by German politicians, civil servants, NGOs, researchers and media, was convened to discuss how to take **effective action on small arms during the German presidency of the EU**.

→ For further information please contact Sami Faltas at faltas@bicc.uni-bonn.de

So far, about 5000 people have visited the *ConverArt - The Art of Disarmament* and BICC information exhibition in the Wissenschaftszentrum Bonn. The exhibition runs from 7 March through 11 April 1999 and will then be shown from 9 June through 9 September in Wünsdorf, the largest military land conversion project in Europe.

→ For further information please contact Susanne Heinke at heinke@bicc.uni-bonn.de