

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Media Briefing

AI Index: POL 30/050/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 265
16 October 2006

Embargo Date: 16 October 2006 13:00 GMT

Media Briefing: Bullets from Greece, China, Russia and United States found in rebel hands in Democratic Republic of Congo

[This is background information for the press release 'Bullets from Greece, China, Russia and United States found in rebel hands in Democratic Republic of Congo']

In September 2006, Control Arms researchers visited compounds in Bunia (in the Ituri District of eastern DRC) to obtain photographic evidence of munitions and weapons recovered from rebel forces since the imposition of the UN arms embargo in July 2003. This followed a previous field mission to Ituri in November 2005 to help identify weapon sources. Armed groups in the Ituri District and neighbouring Kivu Provinces have been subject to various arms embargoes, including by the EU (imposed in April 1993) and the UN since July 2003.

The serial numbers and relevant markings, including head-stamps on ammunition cartridges and markings on rifles, have been identified by international munitions experts and reveal small arms and ammunition manufactured by China, Greece, Russia, South Africa, Serbia and the US

US ammunition

Most surprising is the identification in September 2006 of ammunition that has US markings on them. These rounds have been identified as .300 Winchester Magnum cartridges manufactured by the Federal Cartridge Company. The US State Department has confirmed to the Control Arms Campaign that such ammunition would be subject to US licensing regulations and is currently investigating how bullets of US origin have ended up in the hands of rebel groups in the DRC. In 2003 the UN recovered some US grenades from armed groups in Ituri.

Under US law, the DRC has been ineligible to receive weapons since 1993, except for peacekeeping purposes. This is in addition to the current UN embargo restrictions. It is therefore very likely that the ammunition was legally exported to another country in the region and then diverted to the DRC. An analysis of US customs data reveals that since 2000, the US government has licensed small arms ammunition to Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.[1]

Greek ammunition

As far as the Control Arms campaign is aware, this is the first time Greek bullets have been recovered from the hands of rebel fighters in the DRC. Bullets found by the researchers have been identified as being 7.62mm cartridges, suitable for use in NATO standard caliber assault rifles such as the HK G3 or

Belgium's FN Herstal Fal rifles. Whilst not as ubiquitous as that of the AK 47 and its derivatives, both Fal and G3 assault rifles have been found in the region in large numbers. These bullets bear the head stamp markings of the Greek company, Prykal Greek Powder & Cartridge Company. According to the 2002-2003 catalogue produced by Hellenic Defence Industries, Prykal have exported ammunition to Botswana, Egypt, Kenya, Republic of Congo, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda. [2]

The ammunition identified from Ituri was manufactured in the late 1980s, showing the long shelf life of bullets and hence the vital importance of better regulating their transfer. It is also worth stating that supplies of arms and ammunition to countries like the DRC tend to be very old and very cheap, sourced from surplus stocks. The age of the bullet therefore, is not a reliable indication of the date of the transfer. Very old bullets are often part of recent supplies. For example, from late 2002 to June 2003, Amnesty International found that over four million rounds of Albanian surplus ammunition were supplied to Rwanda, which UN Panel experts concluded was destined for use in DRC. [3]

Serbian small arms

Weapons produced in Serbia (or the former Yugoslavia) have been identified in a number of embargoed destinations and other crisis zones over the last few years. The weapons found in Ituri in September 2006 and identified by researchers included a 7.65 mm Zastava Model 70 self-loading pistol, produced by Serbian company Zastava. In July 2005, Amnesty International documented a request sent to the DRC civil aviation authorities to fly a military cargo from Serbia to Kinshasa. Amnesty International also found that in June 2003, an aircraft operated by Rwandan company, Silverback Cargo, flew arms from Albania to Rwanda, routed via Belgrade. Albanian officials told Amnesty that in the Serbian capital, additional military cargo was loaded onto the Silverback aircraft.[5] Serbian anti-personnel mines and mortar shells were also found in the possession of a DRC armed opposition group in Bukavu in 2004.

Bullets manufactured in 1999 by Prvi Partizan in Uzice in the former Yugoslavia were also used on 13 August 2004 at the Gatumba massacre in Burundi, where 150 refugees were shot dead and more than 100 injured. The Gatumba transit camp is close to the border with the DRC and sheltered civilian Congolese refugees, mainly of the ethnic Banyamulenge, and Burundian returnees.[6] Serbian companies have also been implicated in supplying large quantities of weapons and ammunition in violation of UN arms embargoes on Liberia. [7] One of the cargo firms involved has also delivered arms to the Great Lakes Region.

South African rifles

One of the weapons identified by researchers is a 5.56 mm R4 assault rifle manufactured in South Africa. There is evidence cited by UN investigators that equipment supplied as part of South African military support to Rwanda has found its way to rebel forces fighting in DRC. In July 2004, a UN Group of Experts on the DRC embargo reported that a "newly manufactured South African R5 rifle" was discovered in the DRC in a weapons cache belonging to a rebel faction of RCD-Goma. The weapon was "part of an inventory previously supplied to Rwanda by means of a licensed purchase from South Africa." The UN Panel also reported in October 2003 that it had information indicating that some arms belonging to the UPC (*Union des Patriotes Congolais*, Union of Congolese Patriots), a militia group that has been responsible for grave abuses of human rights in the Ituri district, had originated from the Balkans and South Africa. [8]

Chinese and Russian small arms

Chinese and Russian small arms were also identified by researchers, including two Chinese Type 56 AK-47s and a Russian grenade launcher. UN records for weapons recovered from the UPC in Ituri during September 2003 show that most of weapons consisted of over 3,000 Kalashnikov rifles and corresponding ammunition with markings reportedly from China and Russia. There were also Russian grenade launchers, Russian and US grenades, a variety of other ammunition and some firearms from former Yugoslavia (Serbia) and Israel. [9] In November 2005 the majority of Kalashnikov assault rifles surrendered by armed groups in Ituri were found by Amnesty International and the International Peace Information Service to be the Chinese Type 56 variant. Other assault rifles recovered from armed groups

in Ituri were made in Bulgaria and Romania. [10] It is not known how such Chinese and Russian and other assault rifles were received by armed groups in Ituri.

Arms in the possession of RCD-Goma, the largest armed group operating in the Kivu Provinces of DRC, in 2005 included rocket launchers, armoured cars, machine guns, light artillery, mortars and landmines, manufactured in a wide range of countries, including China, North Korea, Russia, USA, Belgium, France, the former Yugoslavia, Germany, Switzerland, and Bulgaria. [11] RCD Goma has at times had military alliances and also clashes with armed groups in Ituri.

End Notes

[1] See NISAT website for access to UN customs data relating to small arms and ammunition. Data-base accessible via www.nisat.org

[2] With thanks to the Omega foundation for providing this information

[3] See Amnesty International report, "Democratic Republic of Congo, arming the east" AI Index: AFR 62/006/2005, 5 July 2005 Most of this ammunition would have been 20 or 30 years old.

[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid

[6] See "Tracking lethal tools" Control Arms Campaign report, December 2004.

[7] See Report by the UN Panel on Liberia, July 2003 (S/2003/498).

[8] Op cit, Amnesty International Report, DRC Arming the east. The UN Panel submitted a confidential supplement to its report to the Security Council's Sanctions Committee on the DRC in October 2003, hereafter referred in this report to as UN Panel confidential report to the Security Council, October 2003.

[9] Report from MONUC Ituri Brigade, September 2003

[10] International Peace Information Service, "Greed and Guns: Uganda's Role in the Rape of the Congo", August 2006

[11] Data based upon serial numbers of weaponry and munitions collected by the UN and reported to Amnesty International

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