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## **MSP: Small arms leading to human rights abuses in over 100 countries**

*A new Amnesty International report published to coincide with the start of the first ever UN Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons (9th to 20th July), demonstrates that governments and opposition groups in at least 100 countries around the world are using small arms in the violent abuse of human rights.*

*Despite the extent of this abuse, some governments are deliberately attempting to exclude reference to obligatory human rights standards from the Program of Action to be agreed at the UN Conference, seeking to remove any ethical and legally binding dimension to controlling the transfer of small arms. " The UN Conference is supposed to deal with the illegal trade of small arms in all its aspects, but officials have simply removed all the original references to the misuse of small arms for internationally-recognised crimes," said Brian Wood, coordinator of Amnesty International's action on small arms.*

*Powerful states, including the US, China and Russia, lobbied the pre-Conference meetings to exclude or water-down these and other stronger references in the draft text. "Up to now, the main spoilers at the UN Conference are the world's biggest small arms producers and some of their dependants and allies," said Brian Wood. " These states allow transfers of small arms and munitions that expose many populations around the world to persistent human rights abuse, while their police and security aid programs ignore or just pay lip service to human rights standards. This in turn drives up the demand for illicit weapons creating a vicious circle resulting in the suffering of millions of people."*

The report 'Human Rights Abuses with Small Arms' contains cases drawn from Amnesty International's worldwide research over the past two years. Although not exhaustive, it names 100 countries from all continents of the world where human rights abuses by government forces and political opponents using small arms have been documented. Of these, 30 are in Sub-Saharan Africa, 22 in the Americas, 17 in Asia, ten in the Middle East and North Africa and 21 in Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The majority of the reported cases link human rights abuse directly to the firing and exploding of small arms and light weapons in circumstances contrary to international human rights and humanitarian law. However, violent human rights abuses committed with small arms also include cases of women being raped by soldiers at gunpoint, the arbitrary arrest and detention of peaceful protestors and small arms being used by police, soldiers and prison officials to facilitate torture. These abuses by officials increase the demand for illegal weapons by opposition and criminal groups.

During the last decade, Guinea was a place of refuge for hundreds of thousands of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who had fled protracted armed conflicts in their own countries. Since September 2000 it has become increasingly engulfed with political violence and fear for thousands of refugees and Guinean civilians who have been killed, beaten, raped and abducted by armed political groups. Refugees have also been singled out for killings, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and intimidation by Guinean security forces and harassment by Guinean civilians.

In the Russian Federation, serious and widespread human rights violations took place in 2000, including grave crimes against civilians on a massive scale during the renewed armed conflict in the Chechen

Republic (Chechnya). Russian federal forces were responsible for gross human rights violations against the civilian population of Chechnya. Thousands of civilians were killed in indiscriminate attacks and there were widespread reports of torture, incommunicado detention and summary executions.

In Colombia, a country in receipt of massive US military aid and small arms trafficking, civilians are the prime targets as the belligerents compete for territory. In August 2000, six children aged between six and 15 on a school outing were shot dead by the army. Several others were seriously injured. An army patrol opened fire on the school party in Pueblorrico, Antioquia department, allegedly in the belief that they were guerrilla fighters.

In Algeria, the civilian population has been terrorized by bomb and mortar attacks on markets, cafes, trains, buses and other public places and made to fear travelling by road by the presence of roadblocks at which gunmen selectively kill the occupants of passing vehicles. Individual and collective killings by armed groups calling themselves "Islamic groups" have seen men, women, children and babies shot dead, decapitated and mutilated, burned to death or blown apart by bombs. Women abducted by these armed groups have been raped. Unarmed civilians have been shot dead, sometimes in their homes in front of their families, by security forces or paramilitary militias.

The new report also found serious human rights abuses in at least 16 countries known to be medium sized small arms producers, including Brazil, Egypt, India, and South Africa, as well as in over 20 other countries that are reported to produce small arms.

Amnesty International is calling on the UN Conference to take measures to ensure that all states prohibit arms exports unless it can be

*reasonably demonstrated that such arms will not contribute to serious human rights violations, crimes against humanity and war crimes. These measures should include strict controls on arms manufacturers, arms brokers, arms transporters and arms financiers, as well as oversight procedures for legislators. International aid projects to prevent the proliferation and misuse of small arms should include the establishment of accountability and training systems in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials – a UN agreement on human rights that has so far been excluded from the UN Conference draft text.*

Read the Report: [Human rights abuses with small arms: Illustrative cases from Amnesty International reports 2000-2001](#)

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