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Peter Hazdra (Ed.)

## **Small Arms – Big Problem**

A Global Threat to Peace, Security and Development

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# Preface

Walter Feichtinger

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are sometimes regarded as the real weapons of mass destruction. Approximately 300,000 out of 500,000 people who reportedly lose their lives in armed conflicts every year are killed by SALW. Bearing this in mind, it becomes obvious that countermeasures are not only necessary, but rather the precondition for successful international crisis management, in order to achieve sustainable peace. It is a well-known fact that people in war-torn regions keep weapons for self-defence as long as they do not believe that their government can provide adequate security. But SALW are also used by militias for political goals and by other non-state actors for criminal ends.

The abundance of SALW also has an impact on peace operations. There are three main aspects to this: Firstly, external actors – mainly military forces – are responsible for establishing a secure environment as a precondition for development. So, they have to act in a convincing manner, when reducing the number of small arms in order to gain the confidence of the civilian population. Secondly, SALW in the hands of private persons and factions may be a considerable threat to international civilian and military personnel. That is why it is imperative for this personnel to be aware of the dangers and to be prepared for all eventualities.

Thirdly, civilian and military actors are very often involved in the collection, storage and destruction of weapons. Therefore, it is vital for the success of a mission to promote skills in this field and to implement the lessons learned from other missions.

Considerations like these prompted the Institute of Peace Support and Conflict Management at the National Defence Academy to organize a conference in autumn 2006, dealing with the most relevant aspects of

SALW and their impact on security in general, and on international conflict management in particular. One of the key tasks of the institute is to identify the factors that shape and influence the environment of soldiers engaged in international peace operations.

Most of the articles in this volume are based on presentations held in aforementioned conference. The intent of this book was not only to give scholarly perspectives on the issue but also to provide practitioners in the field with useful background knowledge and lessons learned from previous disarmament missions and weapons collection and destruction programmes.

I thank all the authors for sharing their expertise and Dr. Peter Hazdra for compiling this volume. My thanks also go to all institute staff that helped with administrative matters and formatting the book.

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