



**Small Arms Issues in Different Regions of Ethiopia - Local
Small Arms Control:
possible, to what extent?**

Host: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)

Co-Host: Peace and Development Committee (PDC)

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Brot für die Welt

Day 2 Activities

Dire Dawa, Ethiopia 27 - 30th August 2001

Workshop on “Small Arms Issues in Different Regions of Ethiopia. Local Small Arms Control: Possible to What Extent?”

A Report by Team Leaders Regarding the Situation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Eastern and North-Eastern Regions of Ethiopia

Tuesday 28th August 2001.

Report by 4 speakers.

Morning session 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Rapporteur: Yusuf Hassen

I) Afar Region

Mr. Haleto Mohammed, an official in the Police Commission of Afar Region, started off his presentation by saying that 90% of Afar people are pastoralist.

They live in easily-assembled mobile huts which they erect near grazing land and water points. The people are always armed, ostensibly in order to protect themselves and their cattle whenever they move from place to place from possible internal and external attackers. This is necessary in view of the fact that the state has not yet established -throughout the vast region- proper means to guarantee peace and security, such as police stations, courts and law-enforcement agencies, in the rural areas. "We believe that this is the main factor which prompts people to be armed".

He informed the participants that the regional authorities have started to register firearms and issue licenses. However, such activities were discontinued following the recent invasion by Eritrean forces of Ethiopian territories in the North. But, there are plans to continue the process of registration and licensing soon.

II) Somali Region

The second speaker was Mr. Abdulahi Galol who is in charge of the Somali militia. He stated that the region has nine administrative zones with a population of 3.5 millions. 85 % of the people are pastoralist who depend, for their livelihood, on cattle-raising. Usually, different ethnic groups or clans fight with one another for the scarce natural resources, including water and grazing land. Since 1994, a total of 259 persons were killed and 504 injured. Both the Regional State and local Elders Councils try to resolve such conflicts amicably as soon as they start. Mr. Abdulahi said: “There are many factors why there is a huge supply of arms in the region. One of the main sources is Somalia which has a very long border with Ethiopia,

and which was stateless for nearly a decade”. Contrabandists living on both sides of the borders are busy supplying firearms to the nomadic people as well as other interested persons or groups. “The other source is when the soldiers of the former military government of Ethiopia were defeated and demobilized by EPRDF forces in May 1991, they left behind a considerable amount of weapons in the region. Some dissident political parties are using such weapons to destabilize the region’s peace and security situations”.

The firearms acquired illegally are used for the following purposes:

- Giving firearms as a dowry is a deep-rooted cultural practice in the region. Hence, a firearm is considered to be a valuable item.
- If an individual kills another person, a gun is usually given to the victim’s relatives as a form of compensation. In other words, it is considered like ‘blood money’ in the society.
- Weapons are used for protecting human lives, cattle and properties.
- Pastoralist need firearms in order to protect themselves against wild animals.
- Some persons use them for illegal activities or crimes such as cattle- rustling, murder, robbery and for disturbing the region’s peace and security situation.

Mr. Abdulahi informed the participants that the regional authorities have started to register firearms and issue licenses. But according to him, the amount of work made in this regard so far has not been very encouraging. Nonetheless, preparations are underway on the part of the regional administration to be fully engaged in exercising control of illegally- acquired weapons. Mr. Abdulahi closed his speech by saying that there is a need for providing training to the society in order to raise their awareness on illegal trafficking and use of firearms.

III) Harari People National Regional State

Mr. Elias Mohammed, Head of the Justice Bureau of the Harari People National Regional State, made a presentation on behalf of Harari Region. According to him, the main sources of supply of firearms within the region can be classified into two categories. Firstly, the Somali Region which shares long borders on the Eastern and South-Eastern regions with Harari People National Regional State is an important factor. Weapons reach the region from Somalia directly or indirectly. Secondly, the soldiers of the previous military government of Ethiopia left behind a huge supply of firearms when they were defeated and demobilized by EPRDF forces in May 1991. The region is also well known for having had quite a number of military garrisons. The other sources of supply are contrabandists who are responsible for

illegal trafficking of weapons from Somalia and Kenya to the region. Refugees along the eastern region are carrying weapons, which they brought with them when they entered the country in search of freedom and protection of their lives. They are also known to be "traffickers" of weapons.

According to Mr. Elias, people carry guns in the region in order to protect their lives, cattle and properties from robbers or attackers. The registration and licensing of firearms are carried out by the "Police Commission" in a satisfactory manner. Different types of small arms and light weapons have been registered so far. It was reported that a few persons have shown willingness to get their weapons to be registered at the nearest police station. In concluding his presentation, Mr. Elias stated that the following practical measures are in the process of being taken in the region to exercise proper arms control:

- People are advised to not acquire illegal weapons;
- Informing and urging the people who are armed to register their weapons and get their licenses on time;
- Training the society to guard themselves against illegal trafficking of firearms and to be fully aware of the harmful effects of such weapons;
- Exercising appropriate control of firearms at suspected entry points;
- Disarming refugees as soon as they enter the country and exercising appropriate control whenever they move from place to place;

IV) Dire Dawa Administrative Council

Mr. Mohammed Sheik, a senior official of Dire Dawa Administrative Council, spoke about the situation of firearms in and around Dire Dawa. Dire Dawa was established in 1902 (now nearly a century ago). The people are mainly engaged in trade, tourism and industry. Dire Dawa is an entry point for goods being imported from outside of Ethiopia by rail and heavy trucks while at the same time it serves as an export station for Ethiopian produce to the outside world, via the port of Djibouti. The level of unemployment in Dire Dawa is, at present, very high. The economic condition of the people is very low. This is why one often sees youths being organized in groups and committing crimes.

Mr. Mohammed said that Dire Dawa Administrative Council is making encouraging progress in controlling illicit trade and use of firearms in, and outside of, town. For instance, anyone

over the age of 18 is required to get his weapons registered and, accordingly, get a license. The Council has repeatedly informed the general public that any weapon which is not registered will be automatically confiscated in addition to a fine of money and imprisonment.

The main source of supply of firearms are: (1) Somalia, (2) the ex-soldiers of the previous military government and; (3) contrabandists who are only interested in maximizing their profits at the expense of the society. In addition, the culture of the society encourages people to own weapons. Of course, it is recognized that the main reason why the people are armed is to protect their lives, cattle and properties.

Occasionally, there are violent conflicts around Dire Dawa between different ethnic groups over border disputes as well as competition for water and grazing land. However, the Council and Elders resolve them before the conflicts get out of hand. It is illegal for a person to sell his/her weapon to another person. Anyone who is found contravening this regulation is penalized, which can result in the confiscation of his/her weapon. Individuals owning weapons are encouraged by their community to use them for keeping the peace and security of their area. Dire Dawa Administrative Council plans to soon exercise strict controls of weapons at suspected entry points bordering neighboring regions/States. When a person dies, his/her relatives are expected to surrender the weapon to the government. In closing, Mr. Mohammed urged that it is important to address the problems and concerns of the people in advance, before conflicts occur. Otherwise, the control of firearms will not be so easy.

Mr. Solomon Hailu of PDC said: “It should be well recognized that small arms are being used in pastoral areas such as Afar and Somali regions for useful purposes including the protection of human lives, cattle and properties from possible attackers. Hence, one should exercise proper care that the purpose of this conference should not be misconstrued to disarm pastoralist but rather designed to control or regulate small arms under the framework of the people’s cultures so that they are not applied for unlawful purposes”.

V)The experience of International Resource Group (IRG)

Ambassador Ochieng Adala shared the experience of International Resource Group on disarmament and security in the Horn of Africa (IRG) to the participants. IRG was formed in 1994 by a group of concerned citizens from different countries with a view of exploring the possibility of linking economic development, democracy and good governance on one hand and peace and security on the other. One of IRG’s principal objectives is to reduce the large

number of illegal small arms in circulation in the Horn of Africa and the creation of peace and security in the region. It aims to achieve these broad objectives through three methods: small arms research, security sector reform and conflict mapping. IRG is at present in the process of establishing a regional board. The board members will be drawn from seven countries in the Horn of Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan and Somalia. They will be mainly engaged in conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution and serve as peace advocates. There will be a regional conference at the end of October 2001. Participants will be drawn from the government, public security, academics, faith organizations and NGOs. The theme of the conference will be: 'Sustainable Peace and Human Security in the Horn of Africa: Issues and Challenges'.

Ambassador Adala stated that according to the Nairobi Declaration, every state within the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa should establish a national focal point to deal with the problem of small arms and light weapons. IRG will assist in the establishment of such national focal points in some of the Horn of African countries including Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. So far, only one country has established a national focal point out of ten. Two are now in the process of establishing their focal points. According to the Nairobi Declaration, civil societies are expected to encourage their respective governments to accelerate the establishment of the national focal points. However, it should be well recognized that a few governments in the region have doubts or misgivings about civil society organizations (CSO) in general and NGO's in particular. But, Ambassador Adala urged that the CSOs and NGOs have to take up the challenge.

Mr. Yusuf Hassen from PDC asked the following question. "You stated that one of IRG's objectives is to map conflicts within the Horn of Africa. If that is the case, to what extent was IRG able to sense or identify indicators before the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea broke out in 1998 and, if so, what measures it took to inform or consult with the concerned government leaders in order to prevent the conflict from occurring?" Ambassador Adala replied by saying: "Of course, there were many indicators of hostilities and tensions before the conflict. But, one requires the good will of both leaders to act on the information supplied to them not only from IRG but also other sources."

VI) The Kenya Kuria study on how small arms can be controlled

The next speaker was Mr. Peter Marwa, the Regional Research Coordinator of SALIGAD Project. The topic of his paper was: “The Kenya Kuria study on how small arms can be controlled”. The following are the highlights of his speech:

In Kuria (Kenya), between 1986 – 1996, there were a number of conflicts and criminal activities by cattle – rustlers. The violence was so intensive that thousands of livestock had been stolen and several dozens of people killed in the process. In all cases, small arms and light weapons were being used. Unfortunately, there were strong suspicions that the police were siding with the cattle–rustlers, since they seemed to be doing practically nothing to stop the criminal activities. This situation led to the people being helpless. Therefore, the community decided to do something to improve the situation rather than simply being onlookers. They decided to an indigenous method to force the criminal elements in the community to surrender small arms that were being used for cattle-rustling, theft, highway robbery and murder. This indigenous method has three levels of authority:

- The first level is the Inchama with a small number of members, with decision power vested in them
- The second level is Iritongo in which the members listen to appeals from suspects against Inchama decisions. The Iritongo is the most important structure in the traditional system of Kuria. The suspect must plead guilty. He/she is convicted and punishment is ordered whether he/she admits it or not.
- The third level is Sungusungu. These are volunteer youths who carry out Iritongo instructions. It is at this level that small arms in Kuria are collected, confiscated and assembled.

The traditional system is known to have considerably reduced the number of cattle-rustling incidents. For instance, in 1997 the number of incidents was 128. However, by the end of 1998, it dropped down to 26. Over 300 guns were recovered in 1998. However, the traditional system is reported to have two major weaknesses in that the method of investigation, arrest and conviction lacks the necessary modern checks and balances. In addition, it operates from the wrong assumption that a suspect is guilty until proven innocent. During interrogation, the operators employ excessive force which, unfortunately, sometimes leads to death. Also, the traditional system lacks defined relationships with the state institutions such as the police, judiciary, law-enforcement agencies and the local administration. Mr. Peter Marwa concluded his presentation by saying: “The state is

unfortunately failing to effectively manage conflicts. Also, traditional conflict resolution method applied in the case of Kuria has serious flaws in terms of human rights violations. However, it can be improved or modernized with a view of overcoming such shortcomings and supplementing the efforts of the local government administration in dealing with violent conflicts.”

Mr. Yusuf Hassen from PDC asked: “As you well know, we, too, in Ethiopia have traditional conflict management systems which vary from one ethnic group to another. For instance, we have the Boranas in the south and Somalis in the eastern regions of the country. In Kenya, too, you have an extension of these same people living as pastoralist on the bordering states. What in your opinion should be done on our side of the borders to effectively apply the Kuria case of small arms control and conflict management system?” Mr. Marwa replied by saying that there is a major difference between the said people living in both countries. The people in Kuria are agro-pastoralists whereas the Borenas and Somalis living in Ethiopia are for the most part pastoralist. Therefore, the gun control system applied in Kuria may not be so easily applicable in Ethiopia.

VI) Discussion groups

The participants were divided into four groups and were asked to select their chairpersons and rapporteurs. Then, a questionnaire containing five different questions was distributed to them. The group exercises lasted from 4.00-6.00 p.m. Upon completion of their group work, they were advised to present the summaries of their discussions to the plenary session on August 30, 2001 from 4.30-6.00 p.m. Then, they all dispersed for dinner.

Important note:

Just for the record, we would like to inform you that Mr. Tilahun G/kidan of Rado was assigned to take the day's minutes of the conference proceedings. However, after preparing his hand-written minutes and giving them to the conference secretary, unfortunately they could not be found. We apologize for the inconvenience caused to Mr. Tilahun.

Since the deadline for the submission of the conference report to BICC is short and in view of the fact that we didn't want to bother Mr. Tilahun to prepare the minutes all over again, we asked Mr. Yusuf Hassen to prepare the day's report. Accordingly, he prepared it as shown above.

The conference organizers wish to take this opportunity of thanking both Mr. Tilahun and Mr. Yusuf for their cooperation.