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**Exploring the relationship between human security, demand for arms, and disarmament in the Horn of Africa.**

*Introduction*

Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. I will take this opportunity to talk about human security, demand for arms and disarmament.

Most of what I will be saying is based on experience and interactions BICC has had with its partners in the Horn of Africa region over the last 17 months within the framework of the SALIGAD project. SALIGAD is an acronym that stands for small arms and light weapons in the IGAD countries, which are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. On the display table, you will find this brochure which highlights all the projects of BICC on small arms.

The approach we try to focus on within the SALIGAD project is based on the following assumptions:

Without understanding why people seek arms, it is difficult to know how to address the problem. This is the starting point of BICC’s SALIGAD project. In the midst of conflict and failing social and political structures, people in the Horn of Africa are turning to small arms for protection. SALIGAD supports indigenous capacity to analyze the demand side of the small arms equation in the Horn. In doing so, it assists in the development of relevant policies. It presents options for controlling and managing small arms within reach of the people suffering from violence. SALIGAD’s work is thus complementary to initiatives to control supply and to restrict access to small arms and light weapons as done by some of the organizations represented here today.

The goals we pursue are to facilitate dialogue and build capacity for managing small arms so that they do not become daily tools of violence in the IGAD countries. How do we do that? Firstly, by bringing together representatives from NGOs, the academic community and governments and engaging them in a dialogue program. This reinforces humanitarian approaches to development and emphasizes the central importance of creating an environment which is conducive to crisis prevention and regional security.

More specifically the project:

- Offers a platform and forums for the exchange of information, and helps to promote discussion and awareness among development practitioners, policymakers and researchers;
- Generates policy options regarding small arms and light weapons at both national and regional levels;
- Builds local capacity by directly supporting small arms researchers from the region.

Our activities take place on three levels:

- Field research and data collection by local researchers: SALIGAD currently has several studies underway in Kenya, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan. These are studies covering various specific topics such as indigenous arms control or gun-related violence in urban settings and can be considered exploratory studies.
- Dialogue among governments, NGOs and grassroots initiatives: Together with local and international partners, such as the Ploughshares, we have organized workshops and co-hosted conferences in the Horn region. The intention and focus of these activities is to insure that the demand side of small arms is highlighted as equally as the supply side, which was given greater attention until now. The driving forces behind the demand are multi-faceted and our body of knowledge is modest. Understanding the demand side will ultimately lead us to grasp the conditions that generate high demand for small arms and hence frustrates efforts to control them.
- Training and raising the awareness of community leaders: It is mostly our local partners who are engaged in these activities. For example, they invite community leaders to share their traditional methods of limiting proliferation in their districts with others and encourage them to develop new ideas. Though here we have only limited experience as yet.

Let me now share with you a few ideas that have grown out of this project and are the result of the interactions the project has had in some IGAD countries.

#### *Human security*

In many parts of the Horn, especially amongst rural pastoralist societies, the issue of human security is closely linked to small arms. For centuries, people living in these regions have been taking care of their own security, simply because, amongst other reasons, the state has not been able to do so.

Even today, the police who are supposed to provide security are simply not visible in most rural areas. They lack basic things like fuel – even if vehicles are available and functional.

Most police stations and barracks are in appalling conditions, thus police often resort to corruption and the like to earn their living. The solution does not simply lie in upgrading equipment and housing of the police force or improving their benefits and payment schemes, but let us make this a point of discussion, later.

Most pastoralists own small arms and view them as indispensable-working tools to protect their property as well as water points and lands for their herds to graze. Experience has shown them time and again that they can only rely on their arms and group cohesion to do this and not on an ill trained, badly equipped and unmotivated police force. Besides, the closest police station is often kilometers away from rural areas.

Hence, human security is defined for them under this perceived security situation. To rely on a more or less organized police force, that is hardly equipped to guarantee security, would be a deadly exercise. Pastoralists have to protect themselves also from other ethnic groups and at the same time also conduct organized cattle-raiding. They find it legitimate to protect themselves but at the same time they also are a source of violence. In former times they used to have less lethal weapons but, since the seventies at least, many small arms have been brought into the region. Driving forces like self-protection and self-esteem are sought through the barrel by farmers, pastoralists and citizens alike, even if they can't really afford to buy small arms.

#### *The "cultural dimension" of Small Arms*

##### *Bride Price*

“For us an AK 47 or so is like a decoration. Its part of us” Somali elder during a workshop in Dire Dawa/Ethiopia, September 2001

In the Kuria study, we found that the circumcision of boys, celebrated at periodic intervals, marked the beginning of their accumulation of a bride price. A bride price is generally expressed in heads of cattle and is fixed. A young man's ability to cattle-rustle is thus not only a mark of his bravery, but also decides his marriage. Reliable small arms for him and his kin increase his ability to get cattle and minimize his risk of getting caught. What was done a generation ago with less lethal traditional weapons is now done with modern small arms. This is an example of how traditional practices are factors to be considered in trying to understand the demand for small arms.

##### *Vendetta and Warrior Culture*

Something that we might call a culture of vendetta or a warrior culture is quite noticeable in the highlands of Ethiopia and the lowlands of Somalia, and can be found elsewhere in the region. Though intensive studies with anthropological methods are not the objective of the SALIGAD project, we have come up against this issue while trying to understand demand. For example, when a person is killed, revenge as we would call it, or justice as they understand it, must be carried out by the victim's family, often before the burial ceremony takes place. This naturally leads into a spiral of violence and feeds demand for good and reliable small arms.

Celebration of the victor and his heroism is also an important part of that ritual. If, as we have often witnessed and been told in the course of this project, the driving force in such conflict is

revenge, then it is difficult for reconciliation to overcome the built-in preference for retribution.

Of course this culture is not found throughout the Horn of Africa, but it is a reality which needs to be reckoned with and understood. Although it is apparently a diminishing factor, it is still a strong cultural incentive for people to arm themselves.

### *Control locally vs. destruction of small arms*

Most armed pastoralist societies have, in varying degrees, codes of conduct on the use of small arms. For example, clan leaders kept a certain control over small arms owned by individuals of their community and elders committees, which exist in different forms in many societies. The latter are also responsible for spelling out the punishments for capital crime such as murder. Among the Afar ethnic group, a well-defined system of punishment exists for each type of crime.

They often make the point that, though many pastoralist households have small arms, the rate of crime and violent incidents is not high in their community. Indeed, we do not have any statistics I know of, but from basic observation it seems that the density of weapons does not mean automatically the rise of gun-related violence. But this holds true only if we do not include in these statistics the inter-clan armed fights, which nowadays claim many lives and wound thousands because of the availability and utilization of small arms. In a discussion we had with elders we cautiously suggested that surplus weapons should be destroyed but they simply laughed and replied that they did not understand how weapons held in far away places like these hostile and arid lands could become surplus.

But several questions need to be asked beyond these examples of local control of small arms: Can a state in the Horn of Africa afford to have a clan controlled small arms mechanism and a state controlled one side by side?

How can these local small arms containment mechanism be integrated into the monopoly of power?

Is it realistic to assume that the state will be in a position to have a nation-wide law enforcement system in place given the obvious signs of collapsing states in the region?

### *Police Force Leasing of Guns*

People who visit police barracks and military or militia camps in the Horn of Africa are often shocked by the appalling living conditions. Hygiene, housing and the food situation are often extremely bad. Pay for police officers are irregular and insufficient and funds allocated for the police are reportedly diverted. There is a lack of promotion and training opportunities, and equipment is poor. Many police officers complain that they do not even have vehicles and fuel to carry out normal patrols, because the funds allocated go astray.

This situation leads to criminals being armed.

According to the SALIGAD study in Nairobi, some police officers rent their arms to gangsters and bandits at night as a means of generating income. This feeds demand as citizens, who can't rely on the police in these circumstances, arm themselves for self-defence. Our field observations and interviews indicate that income generation through selling, renting or leasing of official weapons is a fairly widespread phenomenon.

While it is true that a better trained, equipped, paid and motivated force could end this depressing situation, caution must be exercised. Strengthening the force is not necessarily desirable if it is not accompanied by human rights training and improved civilian controls. In Kenya, the public perception of the police is of a corrupt and brutal force, which has little regard for protecting citizens. Professionalization of the force is complicated and can only work if citizens are convinced that the forces are not only better equipped but also accountable for respecting human rights.

### *Refugees and small arms*

Governments in the region, NGO's and the media often accuse refugees of being a prime source of small arms inflows. This is an area that partners of BICC are looking into, but not the main focus of SALIGAD's work. But I would like to emphasize that governments and civil societies blaming of refugees for small arms proliferation is often done to divert the attention from the domestic home grown problem of availability and utilization of small arms. It is indisputable that many refugees often leave their countries with arms but, generally, this is because they had been fighting with government troops before they left or had to fight their way out of highly critical situations. We also know that refugee camps are often infiltrated by armed groups or gangs who try to recruit followers and tax refugees by collecting donations in kind and/or in cash.

A basic measure can be to screen the refugees before they enter in camps. But let us not be too optimistic. Porous borders will always be a source of arms circulation. To blame the entire small arms problem in the Horn on Somalia or Somali refugees is a quick response, but will not bring a sustainable solution.

### *Outlook*

1. A better equipped and more professional law enforcement agency would, up to a certain degree, reduce the demand, provided that this agency is impartial and can provide security for all citizens. But this will not happen automatically and I doubt that it can be guaranteed in the foreseeable future.
2. Many groups already armed -mostly without the official license to carry arms- will not be ready to just return their arms. The collective clan based small arms management has to be studied further and ways have to be found to harmonize modern legislation and traditional

code of conduct.

3. Without the cooperation and active participation of vulnerable but armed rural groups, the state authorities alone will not be able to solve the problem of the availability of small arms in most parts of the Horn of Africa.