

## Effects of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Communities: with Special Reference to Non-Conflict Regions of Sri Lanka

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Proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the human society indicates that there is a considerable demand for it from different segments of the society. The level of competition or struggle to survive as a member of the society today is very high and when there is no socially accepted means to work out an existence, some members of society tend to choose unaccepted means to achieve their aspirations. However, majority of the people condemn their activities while labelling them as criminals, rebels, or terrorists and their activities are labelled as crimes, illegal acts or terrorism. When we analyze these acts and go deep into the problem, we find that there are several root causes which have a direct link with certain unjust reactions of others in the same society. This study is aimed to understand the level of proliferation of SALW and its social impacts to the Sri Lankan society today. The methodology of the study is mainly comprised with qualitative techniques, such as Key-informant discussions, focused group discussions, and observation.

There is a long history related to use of weapons in Sri Lanka. Evidently the moors have introduced small arms and light weapons to Sri Lanka and subsequently it proliferated with the Portuguese invasion of the country in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Thereafter, natives started to use these weapons and also to produce many small arms and light weapons locally. It is very clear that a prolonged civil war in any society brings disastrous results in its wake. We have experienced basically three social upheavals during last three decades of the Sri Lankan history. Janatha Vimukhi Peramuna is responsible for two such situations in 1971 and 1988/89 respectively. The other most crucial factor is ethno-political war in Northern and Eastern parts of the country and the LTTE is mainly responsible for prolonging the war in the North and East. These three factors are responsible for the degeneration of many human values which were cherished by our society from early times.

The study reveals that the Police alone cannot combat crimes in the society or prevent illegal use of weapons. Therefore, it is a bounden duty of the civil society to organize itself to protest against the use of illegal weapons on innocent civilians. Finally, the study has identified several negative and positive impacts in proliferation of SALW in the Sri Lankan society while emphasising control and preventive measures.

**Key words:** *small arms, light weapons, social impact, illegal weapons.*