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Organization Profile: Small Arms Survey

by Jeremiah Smith [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]



Established in 1999, Small Arms Survey is an independent research project providing public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. The project conducts and collaborates on research efforts related to small-arms issues worldwide, seeking to further the theory and practice of disarmament and reduction of small arms. Its most recent yearbook focused on armed groups, gangs, and their small-arms holdings and means of acquisition.

Small-arms use in conflict and crime not only takes a direct toll on human life, but also causes major economic, humanitarian and societal problems. The proliferation of small arms prolongs conflicts, hinders economic and political development, perpetuates crime, and in many cases, contributes to human-rights violations. Unfortunately, without adequate information, governments, activists and policymakers are unable to effectively address the problem.

Origins and Focus

In response to these issues, the Small Arms Survey was established in 1999 with the support of the Swiss government. Since 2000, SAS has also received funding from the governments of more than 12 countries as well as various United Nations agencies. Located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, the project has an international staff with expertise in many fields, including conflict resolution, security studies and economics. It was founded with six basic objectives:

1. Serve as the principal source of public information on small arms
2. Act as an informational resource for governments, organizations, researchers, activists and others in the field
3. Independently monitor nongovernmental and governmental initiatives on small arms
4. Assist and support efforts addressing the effects of small-arms use and proliferation
5. Undertake and collaborate on various research projects
6. Act as a forum for information and data sharing regarding all aspects of small arms¹

Activities

SAS's activities include publishing a variety of materials. SAS also undertakes joint projects with organizations, researchers, and partner institutions around the world, and keeps extensive databases on all aspects of small-arms proliferation.

1. **Annual review:** SAS publishes an annual review of small-arms initiatives and issues. The publication deals with small-arms production, transfer, stockpiling and use, as well as the effect these issues have on civilians and

governments in affected regions. SAS also monitors governmental and nongovernmental initiatives to combat small-arms proliferation and outlines them in its annual review.

2. **Book series, special reports and papers:** SAS publishes books, papers and reports on small-arms issues, initiatives and research methodology. Some publications have a more general focus, discussing broad themes in small-arms proliferation, while other publications deal with specific issues, countries or regions.²
3. **Commissioned research and joint projects:** In addition to its own research and monitoring activities, SAS collaborates with independent researchers in the field and commissions research from these experts and its many partner agencies worldwide. The findings are featured in the project's various publications and deal with all aspects of small-arms proliferation and control.
4. **Database and resource center:** In keeping with its mission, SAS also acts as an information hub for small-arms data. The group maintains and updates a database of information on small-arms issues, including country-specific information. Additionally, a collection of literature is accessible through at the center to researchers and other interested parties.¹
5. **Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment:** The Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment is a multi-year research project SAS developed in 2005 with assistance from the Canadian government, United Nations Mission in Sudan, United Nations Development Programme and other NGO partners. HSBA was initiated because of the "challenges necessary in administering the comprehensive peace agreement in Darfur"³ and aims to support small-arms initiatives within Sudan. The project investigates arms flow, both within the country and across its borders; arms holdings of state and non-state actors; armed groups, and their command, control and areas of operation; demand for small arms, and the effects of small-arms use, both direct and indirect. Its findings are published regularly in issue briefs and working papers, as well as in occasional editorials and practitioner articles.⁴
6. **Weapons ID Portal:** SAS also maintains two comprehensive identification systems, one for ammunition and one for weapons, both of which are accessible through the project's website. These systems are designed to allow individuals and organizations to access information on identifying and tracing the origins of weapons and ammunition.
 - The first identification system comprises **an ammunition tracing kit** with guidelines on how to collect data from recovered ammunition and a central information repository for data reported to SAS.⁵ In 2006, SAS began collecting and analyzing information on small caliber munitions, and has since launched small pilot projects in the field. That collection of data has now evolved into the creation of a central repository for ammunition data. Furthermore, the center provides an ammunition tracing service to all practitioners in the field and anyone with a stake in restricting trade of illicit ammunition.⁶
 - The second identification system is an online collection of **weapons identification sheets**, which outline the visual information needed to accurately recognize and record particular types of weapons encountered in the field. The system has been redesigned and now features downloadable sheets and more extensive data on weapons around the world. The new system is available online, and users can identify weapons by searching visually through pictures or by searching for key features like caliber or country of origin.⁷

SAS is also beginning to explore social media and other alternative media to better reach its audience.² With the necessary support of donor governments and organizations, SAS will continue as the principal source of public information on small-arms proliferation. ↴

This article was compiled by CISR staff member, Jeremiah Smith. Contact him at maic@jmu.edu.

Endnotes

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Contact Information

Eric Berman
Managing Director
Small Arms Survey
Avenue Blanc 47
Geneva 1202 / Switzerland
Tel: 41 22 908 5777
Fax: 41 22 732 2738
Website: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/home.html>
E-mail: [eric.berman\(at\)smallarmssurvey.org](mailto:eric.berman(at)smallarmssurvey.org)



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