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Consolidating Peace through PSSM Projects in Burundi

Small arms and light weapons have been a problem in Burundi due to the Burundi Civil War. This article focuses on the programs that (MAG) Mines Advisory Group and the Burundian police have instituted to reduce stockpiles and improve physical security and stockpile management in the country.

by Julie Claveau [Mines Advisory Group]

One consequence of Burundi's 10-year civil war has been the widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons throughout the country. In 2007, nearly 100,000 households in Burundi were thought to possess at least one weapon.¹ This estimate is a major concern, not only due to heightened levels of violent crime, but also because the availability of arms at a time of ongoing political insecurity increases the risk of a return to conflict. In addition, the civil war, compounded by a lack of human and financial resources, has led to the weak management of weapons and ammunition by the Burundian state. The police and the army have recognized the problem of pilferage of their stocks, which is feeding the black market, as well as the threat of explosions posed by unsecured stockpiles.

This situation led Mines Advisory Group to start a Physical Security and Stockpile Management Project in Burundi in 2007. MAG first became involved in the destruction of SA/LW during the 1990s through its support of demobilization/disarmament/reintegration activities in Angola and Cambodia. In 2006, a large-scale PSSM project was set up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reduce the risks posed by the SA/LW in the Congolese Army stocks. Building on the lessons learned from this project, MAG has chosen to expand its PSSM activities to neighboring countries that need its services.

MAG started operations in Burundi to support the *Force de Defense Nationale*

(the Burundian Army) in destroying a stock of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) and other SA/LW. MAG set up a weapons-destruction workshop and trained



MAG Technical Field Manager reviewing the inventory of weapons with an armorer during the survey of police SA/LW stocks and procedures.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAG BURUNDI

a team of 15 military staff to destroy all types of firearms using disk cutters and hydraulic shears. It trained another team in the safe transport and destruction of ammunition.

MAG Burundi's PSSM Activities

Through numerous PSSM activities during this short-term project, MAG learned how best to support the Burundian state to reduce the

risks posed by SA/LW. Burundi is a signatory of the *Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of SALW in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa*,² a regional protocol to fight the proliferation of SA/LW. MAG's experience meant the organization could be of great assistance in the implementation of Articles 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the Protocol:

- Article 6: Control and Accountability of State-owned Small Arms and Light Weapons
- Article 7: Marking and Tracing of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Record-keeping
- Article 8: Disposal of State-owned Small Arms and Light Weapons
- Article 9: Disposal of Confiscated or Unlicensed Small Arms and Light Weapons

However, the key to starting large-scale PSSM activities was the willingness of the Burundian authorities to see it happen. Following a request from the Executive Director of the *Police Nationale du Burundi*, a MAG-PNB mobile team was set up in early 2008 to collect and destroy SA/LW seized by the police or voluntarily handed over by the population at police stations. Eight police officers were detached to MAG and were trained and supervised by a MAG Technical Field Manager for a full year to conduct the work nationwide.

Shortly after this project began, the PNB requested further support from MAG to conduct a survey of PNB SA/LW. The objective was to gather sufficient information to draft a strategy to implement Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Nairobi Protocol. Two joint MAG-PNB teams conducted the five-month survey, assessing the type, quantity and state of PNB-owned SA/LW and how they were stored and managed. MAG officially presented the results of this survey to the PNB in June 2009, which led to a comprehensive PSSM project with the PNB. The main conclusions of the survey were:

- Large quantities of SA/LW in storage are obsolete, not fit for use or surplus to requirements.
- Retention of this surplus SA/LW puts unnecessary pressure on limited storage facilities and gives rise to dangerous storage methods.
- Physical storage facilities are poor; the

lack of security poses risks, including unauthorized access.

- Armorers lack the skills and knowledge to safely store and manage SA/LW under their charge.

MAG and PNB Solutions for SA/LW

In collaboration with the PNB, MAG proposed a set of countrywide solutions that it could rapidly implement at limited cost while significantly improving the SA/LW situation. The need was urgent because many were afraid that the 2010 elections could lead to an increase in violence, including large-scale organized violence. The international community and the police considered reduced access to unsecure stockpiles an essential measure to secure the elections.

Due to the quick responses of the Dutch and Swiss governments, who immediately contributed funds for the initiative, MAG and the PNB were able to start working immediately. With a plan to complete the project by December 2010, MAG and the PNB are implementing solutions to do the following:

1. Destroy obsolete and surplus SA/LW
2. Improve the physical security of PNB armories
3. Train the PNB armorers to safely store and manage SA/LW

The international community recognizes the destruction of surplus stocks as a necessary measure to prevent weapons from illegally moving to other countries or falling into subversive hands through theft, mismanagement or corruption. Moreover, the police are removing all hand grenades—a weapon unfit for police purposes—from armories, which is a significant step toward improving security in Burundi. Grenades are used daily as weapons in petty crimes, family issues, and land disputes and were responsible for almost a quarter of all violent deaths in Burundi in 2008.³ In 2009 alone, MAG Burundi destroyed over 14,000 hand grenades; about 8,500 grenades were part of police-owned stocks and the other 5,500 were grenades that had been collected from the population during the civilian disarmament campaign.

The improvement of the physical security of armories aims to reduce the ease of access to weapons and facilitate a more professional approach from the armorers in terms of their management of the inventory. The main element is the installation of gun racks, which means that by the end of the project all weapons will be under lock and key, including all magazines and handguns that are stored in specially designed drawers. Before the project, the best armories were equipped with artisanal wooden gun racks without any cables or locks, and

more willing to implement safety measures. It is also one more step that contributes to developing a peacetime mindset within the new security forces.

The success of the PSSM project with the PNB made the *Force de Defense Nationale* interested in a similar project. Consequently, a nationwide survey of FDN SA/LW by a mixed FDN-MAG team is ongoing and is likely to lead to actions similar to those implemented with the PNB in order to reduce the risks of diversion and unplanned detonations.



The physical security team improves the security of a police armorer's window.

the worst ones had no form of weapons storage.

In secure storage sites where the police keep large quantities of weapons, they reinforce the windows and doors and install hatches to limit access to authorized personnel only. Heavy metal doors replace wooden doors and stronger padlock hinges replace the weaker ones. A monitoring visit in the southern region of Burundi demonstrated that the improvement of armories also positively affected the morale of the armorers and made the police officers

Finally, MAG is also supporting the civilian disarmament campaign by destroying SA/LW that the population handed over during the weapons amnesty period that ended in October 2009. This campaign was implemented by the *Commission Nationale de Desarmement Civil et de lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères et de Petit Calibre*, which encouraged the population to voluntarily hand over their weapons in exchange for material compensation such as bicycles, cement or cloth.



A member of the MAG-PNB team mobile team collects hand grenades for destruction.

Conclusion

The PSSM and SA/LW destruction activities are taking place simultaneously in the three sectors where SA/LW are present—the civilian population, the police, and the army. These projects are implemented with strong support from the authorities, and are expected to have a strong impact on the proliferation of SA/LW in Burundi. Moreover, MAG is thinking about the future and is working to build a resilient and sustainable capacity with the local authorities through training, mentoring and advising so it can continue managing SA/LW after the Burundi program completes its work. MAG's work in Burundi has shown that PSSM projects have their place within the Security Sector Reform agenda. MAG's staff is doing much more than simply destroying weapons: They are supporting the transition of security forces from a conflict to peacetime mentality, reducing the risks posed by SA/LW to civilians and eliminating the availability of weapons as a potential stimulant of renewed conflict. †

See Endnotes, Page 82



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