

# Stabilizing Cambodia

## SMALL ARMS CONTROL AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The international community has supported Cambodia's stabilization since the late 1980s, and much progress has been made. The Cambodian government made weapons control one of its priorities after the elections in 1998. The Khmer NGO Working Group for Weapons Reduction (WGWR) has been an active partner of the government and the international community. Over the last five years Cambodia has been the beneficiary of support for small arms control programmes through the European Union's Assistance in Curbing Small Arms and Light Weapons (EU ASAC) and the Japan Assistance Team for Small Arms Management in Cambodia (JSAC).

Interventions have focused on weapons collection, weapons for development initiatives, destruction of surplus stocks, and safe storage construction and registration system for government stockpiles.

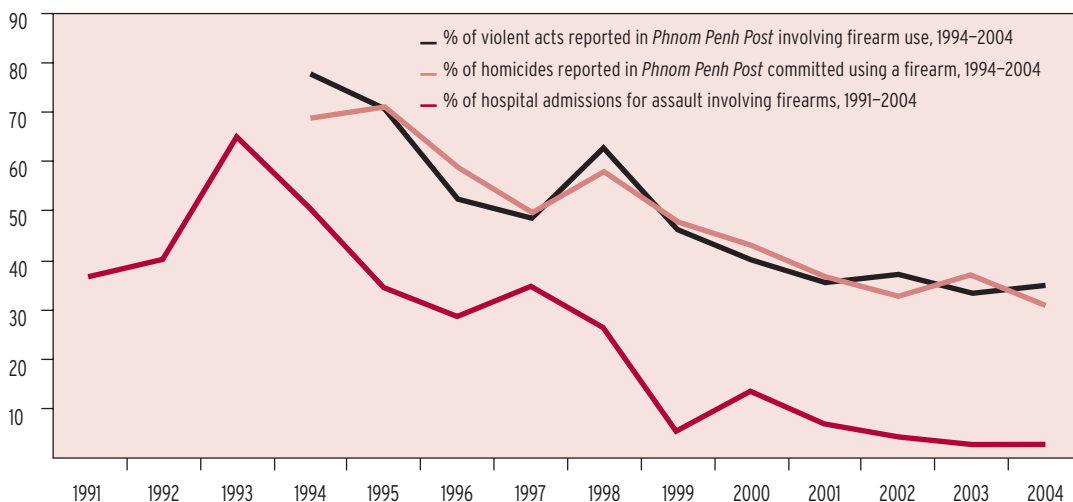
Small arms and light weapons interventions in Cambodia have successfully removed large quantities of such arms from circulation outside of government control. Some 130,000 weapons have been collected and more than 180,000 destroyed. It is estimated that these initiatives have reduced the pool of illegal and unregistered firearms from between 150,000–216,000 prior to the start of the programmes in the late 1990s to 22,000–85,000 in 2006.

**A substantial proportion of uncontrolled small arms has been collected and destroyed.**

The reduction in the number of small arms and light weapons has had a positive impact on human security in Cambodia, where guns are now less commonly used in violent incidents and homicides. The use of firearms in all acts of violence reported by the *Phnom Penh Post* declined from 80 per cent in 1994 to 30 per cent in 2004. The findings are similar when the analysis is restricted to homicides. In 1994, 69 per cent of reported homicides were committed with a gun. By 2004 this figure had dropped to 30 per cent. The hospital admissions data for assaults indicates a similar trend. In 1993, 65 per cent of victims of assault admitted to hospital had suffered from bullet wounds. By 2004 this figure had fallen to just 2.6 per cent. During the period of the small arms interventions, firearm homicide declined dramatically from 4.0–5.4 per 100 000 in 1998 to 1.1–1.7 in 2003. The overall homicide rate dropped from 6.9–9.0 per 100 000 in 1998 to 3.1–4.0 in 2003.

These measures have made a significant contribution to removing weapons from civilian and insurgents' hands. In present-day Cambodia, members of the security forces and certain government officials are the only legal small arms users. Large-scale destruction of surplus military stockpiles and safe storage programmes for government stockpiles have reduced the danger of future leakages and uncontrolled exports.

Figure 5.2 **Rate of firearms use in homicides, acts of violence, and causes of hospital admissions (%), 1991–2004**



Source: Wille (2006b)



A policeman stands before a pile of nearly 7,000 guns and other small arms in Kampong Cham province north of Phnom Penh in July 2001. Cambodian authorities lit a massive bonfire to destroy the weapons as part of an ongoing effort to rid Cambodia of illegal arms. © Chor Sokunthea/Reuters

Nevertheless, NGOs and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia have highlighted problems relating to the competence, professionalism, and integrity of the security forces and the rules of engagement for the police. A survey carried out by the WGWR shows that police, militia, and soldiers top the list of those 'most likely to use a gun to get their way'.

Both the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and the police received a considerable influx of members from the former armed factions following the peace accords. Because gaining a position in these forces was part of the peace dividend for former combatants it has been difficult to institutionalize integrity and professionalism among the forces. Core values and norms that govern the behaviour of the police and armed forces continue to be based on informal relationships that often override formal rules. The security forces operate in complex webs of social relations and obligations that provide powerful individuals with a support base and offer a means of social advancement and personal enrichment for their supporters.

Illegal logging is one sector from which units within the RCAF and the police reap a profit. The NGO Global Witness has documented in detail how members of the military provide security services for private companies carrying out logging in return for payment collected at various stages of the timber extraction process. This system is facilitated by the fact that most logging operations contravene forestry law. Payments provide protection against law enforcement and are passed up the chain of command from junior officers to superiors, and ultimately to senior officials in the capital.

A further issue of concern is that the police's ability to effectively tackle crime—including firearms crime—is hampered by the lack of adequate training, resource constraints, low pay, lack of equipment, and weakness of forensic and investigative capacity.

In addition, commentators on the Cambodian political system have highlighted the absence of democratic governance of the security sector. These problems highlight the need for more consistent linkages between security sector reform and small arms programmes.

By removing civil war guns from uncontrolled circulation small arms programmes have contributed to a crucial precondition for security sector reform by returning to the security forces the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Innovative safe storage and stockpile registration programmes have also addressed a serious institutional shortcoming in stockpile management. Yet the broader aspects of security sector management issues, in particular the absence of greater accountability of the Cambodian security forces to the people of Cambodia, have not been addressed in post-conflict Cambodia.

**Programmes that remove civil war guns from uncontrolled circulation are a precondition for security sector reform.**

Cambodia is a good example of the significant human security gains that small arms control programmes can yield, yet it also demonstrates the limits of such efforts if broader security sector issues are not addressed. The case of Cambodia underlines the need to address synergies between small arms control and broader security sector reforms. ■