

Press Release

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Every Body Counts

Violent deaths decrease; yet armed conflict grows more lethal

Geneva, 8 May 2015 – *The Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts* reveals that violent deaths decreased globally; yet armed conflict grows more lethal.

This edition estimates 508,000 violent deaths per year between 2007–12, down from 526,000 reported in 2011 for the period 2004–09. A larger proportion of these deaths, however, were directly related to conflict (70,000 deaths per year, up from 55,000).

Data shows that lethal violence was highly concentrated among a small group of countries: 25 per cent of violent deaths occurred in 18 countries that count only four per cent of the world's population. The three most violent countries in 2012 were Syria, Honduras, and Venezuela.

While the global number of violent deaths decreased, the economic impact of homicide increased. The report calculates the global cost of homicide in 2010 at USD 171 billion, a 6 per cent increase on USD 160 billion in 2000. The longer, safer, and more productive people's lives become, the higher the economic cost of homicide. Those countries with growing economies and high homicide level stand to reap the most economic benefit from violence prevention efforts.

Other findings include:

- Intense outbreaks of conflict-related violence result in sharp peaks in the rate of violent deaths in affected countries. Libya and Syria experienced the most violent crises in 2011 and 2012 respectively, with a rate of 276.5 violent deaths per 100,000 population in 2011 in Libya (or a total of approximately 17,000 violent deaths), and 180.2 in 2012 in Syria (39,000 violent deaths).
- Violence was concentrated in non-conflict countries. Among the 18 top-ranking countries (those with an average over 30 violent deaths per 100,000 population over the study period), only one-third were experiencing armed conflict. In 2012, the violent death rate of Honduras (90.4) and Venezuela (72.2) ranked these countries just after Syria.
- The number of women victims of homicide decreased. The global estimate of 60,000 female homicide victims per year is almost ten per cent lower than that for 2004–09. Compared to the data from the previous edition, Honduras and El Salvador show the most dramatic increases in the rate of female homicides. For the same period, rates in South Africa registered the sharpest drop, though the average remains high.
- Firearms were used in 44 per cent of all violent killings, or an annual average of nearly 197,000 deaths for the period 2007–12. The share of firearms-related deaths was highest in Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.
- Disaggregated data at the subnational level can help to define priorities for interventions and identify targets for programmes and assistance where they are likely to be most effective. For example in Brazil, trend data show that while rates of lethal violence decreased in state capitals such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, they increased in the north of the country and smaller municipalities, with no major effect on the national rate.

A new interactive online tool, available at www.smallarmssurvey.org/GBAV, allows users to examine lethal violence data at the national level.

The *Global Burden of Armed Violence* series represents a unique integrated approach to understanding the global impact of lethal violence, and provides a solid base for supporting the measuring and implementation of the proposed Goal 16 on 'peaceful and inclusive societies' in the post-2015 development framework.

The three editions of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* are based on a comprehensive database that covers violent deaths across both conflict and non-conflict settings. The ongoing research, conducted by the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey, is a key monitoring tool for the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. This diplomatic initiative was launched by Switzerland and UNDP in 2006 with the goal of achieving a measurable reduction in the burden of armed violence by 2015. ■

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Background

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative aimed at addressing the interrelations between armed violence and development. Launched in 2006 by UNDP and Switzerland, and initially supported by 41 other countries, the Geneva Declaration strives to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and improvements in human security by 2015. It is currently supported by 113 countries. The Small Arms Survey hosts the Secretariat of the Declaration.

The Small Arms Survey has led the research under the 'measurability pillar' of the Geneva Declaration since the beginning of the initiative. In this framework the Small Arms Survey has produced the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* reports (2008, 2011, and 2015) which take an integrated approach to the complex and volatile dynamics of lethal violence around the world.

The *Global Burden of Armed Violence* reports use 'violent deaths' as the main indicator for measuring and monitoring the scope and impact of armed violence globally, and refine a methodology for its collection and analysis. The violent death of a human being is the most extreme consequence of armed violence, and is treated seriously in all societies. For this reason it is likely to be recorded more accurately than other violent events. As a consequence, the number of persons who die violently is frequently used as a proxy measure for insecurity in both conflict and non-conflict settings.

The *Global Burden of Armed Violence* is published by Cambridge University Press.