



Executive Summary¹

In Burundi, armed violence still claims thousands of direct and indirect victims every year. As in other post-conflict environments, the official end of the war has not guaranteed security for the population, whether real or perceived, nor has it signalled an end to acts of armed violence. The Small Arms Survey—in collaboration with the Burundian National Commission for Civilian Disarmament and Prevention of Weapons Proliferation; the Ligue Iteka, a Burundian human rights organization; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); DanChurch Aid; and independent Burundian researchers—has carried out a study of armed violence in Burundi with the aim of providing an analysis of the situation that may inform violence reduction programming. The study made use of several methodological tools, including a survey that was administered among 1,500 households in six provinces, individual interviews and focus groups, and an analysis of the existing institutional data on the reality and effects of armed violence in the country.

a) Characteristics of armed violence in Burundi

Types of violence

The various forms of armed violence encountered in Burundi are common to post-conflict countries that have not yet completed the transition to peace. In Burundi, the most frequently observed type of armed violence is linked to banditry. Of those interviewed by the Small Arms Survey and the Ligue Iteka, 88.4 per cent (x=532, n=602) cited armed robbery and burglary as the most common acts of armed violence in their *colline*, or neighbourhood. The Observatory of Armed Violence, which was set up by UNDP, confirms this perception: between August 2007 and December 2008, 50 per cent of the 1,867 acts of armed violence recorded were acts of ‘banditry’. Acts of armed violence relating to land disputes are a distant second (5.6 per cent), followed

1. This is the executive summary from ‘*Insecurity is also a war: An assessment of armed violence in Burundi*’ (forthcoming). The report is published in French as « *L’insécurité est une autre guerre* » : *Analyse de la violence armée au Burundi* (2009).



PHOTO ▶ A sign bans weapons in Ruyigi province. © Markus Marcetic/ Moment/Redux

by domestic disputes (4.9 per cent), acts connected to the last active rebel group, the Palipehutu-Forces nationales de libération (FNL) (4.2 per cent), and police blunders (2.6 per cent). Political violence, be it in the form of threats or even targeted assassinations, features regularly in the local news. Finally, the Seruka Centre, run by Doctors without Borders–Belgium, the most important medical centre treating rape victims in Burundi, estimates that 14 per cent of rapes are committed under the threat of a weapon.

Location of acts of violence

The provinces most affected by armed violence are the capital Bujumbura-Mairie, Bubanza, and Bujumbura Rural. Media analysis using the Taback–Coupland method shows that, unlike other African countries such as Uganda and Nigeria, where violence occurs mainly in the street, in Burundi acts of armed violence tend to take place at night inside the victims' homes. More than 40 per cent of survey respondents said that they did not feel safe in their homes at night.

Weapons

When asked about the types of weapon held by their fellow citizens, respondents cited automatic rifles, grenades, and handguns. In 2008, nearly

60 per cent of acts of armed violence recorded by the Observatory were committed with a firearm. Armed violence in Burundi is also characterized by a high use of grenades (22 per cent of acts of armed violence recorded by the Observatory in 2008). The weapons used during acts of violence differ according to the nature of the act and the perpetrators. Acts of banditry are committed mainly with firearms, while bladed weapons are the most common weapon used in domestic violence. The lethality of such acts depends on the type of weapon used: Ligue Iteka records for 2007 show that one or more deaths occurred as a result of 70 per cent of acts of violence committed with a firearm and 61 per cent of acts committed using a bladed weapon.

Victims

Observatory data¹ reveals that armed violence led to 1,049 deaths and 1,262 persons being injured in 2008; it also places the rate of homicide committed with a weapon at 12.3 per 100,000 persons.² Ligue Iteka data for 2007 shows that 89 per cent of the victims of armed violence were civilians. A majority of the victims were men: in 2007, only 26 per cent of acts of armed violence involved one or more female victims. On the other hand, female victims are

more affected by sexual violence; 97 per cent of the 1,435 rape victims treated by the Seruka Centre in 2007 were female, most of them minors. The strong social stigma suffered by rape victims in Burundi suggests that the real number of victims is much higher, particularly among adult females.³

Perpetrators

A majority of the perpetrators of armed violence are men under the age of 30. Burundian police data reveals that 97 per cent of offences recorded in 2006 were committed by men and that nearly half of all perpetrators (of acts of violence) were 19 to 30 years old. The Observatory has shown that of the acts of armed violence that were committed between August 2007 and December 2008 and for which perpetrators were identified, Palipehutu-FNL committed nearly half (49.5 per cent), civilians were responsible for 34.7 per cent, police officers committed 9 per cent, and soldiers fewer than 6.6 per cent. Bandits were, however, identified as the principal source of insecurity by about three-quarters of all survey respondents (76.0 per cent, $x=576$, $n=758$), followed by rebels, police officers, and ex-combatants. The boundaries between these categories are relatively fluid, as some armed bandits sometimes wear army or police uniforms in order to deceive their victims about their identity. Nevertheless, many reports and witness statements denounce members of the Burundian army, police, and intelligence service who occasionally take part in armed violence. Finally, ex-combatants seemed to be more stigmatized by the population in 2008 than they were in 2005, which may be a consequence of the relative failure of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programme.

Costs

The Human Development Index ranks Burundi 167 out of 177.⁴ According to the International Monetary Fund, the provinces that were most affected by the war, such as Bubanza and Bujumbura Rural, were also most impoverished during the war. These provinces now record the highest number of acts of armed violence.

For individuals, armed violence brings heavy medical, legal, and social costs. The medical expenses incurred as a result of a bullet wound reach about USD 400, and a lawyer charges an average of USD 200–USD 500 to defend a client—exorbitant prices in a country where between 41 and 90 per cent of the population live below the poverty line.⁵ To these costs must be added the psychological consequences of acts of violence in a country that has almost no psychiatrists or facilities for the treatment of mental illness and in which society often stigmatizes the victims, especially women who have suffered sexual violence.

b) Changes in perceptions of security (2005–08)

Since the Small Arms Survey's 2005 study on light weapons in Burundi (Pézard and Florquin, 2007), a certain number of positive changes have taken place:

- Perceptions of weapons have changed since 2005: in 2008 a larger number of respondents thought that weapons were more of a danger than a source of protection.
- The results of the new study show that opinions regarding disarmament are relatively stable, with as many people wishing to take part in a disarmament programme in 2008 as in 2005.

These two factors suggest that now is a more appropriate time than ever to invest in a programme to disarm the civilian population.

This report nevertheless sheds light on major difficulties that remain, and on new problems that have appeared in the last three years:

- There is still a dilemma between security and disarmament. While both surveys suggest that the population broadly supports the disarmament of civilians and would support such a programme unreservedly, other factors indicate that, in reality, there must be a return to relative security before people will be willing to participate in such a programme.
- In spite of the progress that has been made towards a final settlement of the conflict between Palipehutu-FNL and the Burundian government, the situation remains volatile, creating a climate of uncertainty in which feelings of insecurity thrive. Acts of banditry are committed by men in uniform who might be members of the army, rebels, or simply civilians who wish to be taken for members of one or the other.
- Ex-combatants (commonly known as *démobilisés*) are significantly more stigmatized in 2008 than they were in 2005. Cited in the survey as the largest category of persons in possession of firearms, even ahead of the army and the police, these ex-combatants, for whom socio-economic reintegration is difficult, are accused of resorting to banditry, of offering their services and weapons to criminals, of acting as hired assassins, and more generally of being a major source of insecurity. These allegations, which are difficult to verify, mean that the demobilized combatants, who form a distinct group, are marginalized and no longer considered to be ordinary 'civilians'. Meanwhile, the police force and the army are downsizing and negotiations are under way to demobilize the combatants of the FNL; since these two measures are bound to increase the number of demobilized individuals, programmes that target this at-risk group must urgently be developed.

c) What action can be taken to combat armed violence?

Action to improve the situation can be taken on several fronts: the institutions responsible for security and justice need to be strengthened; populations at risk need to be made less vulnerable; and measures should be taken to reduce the number of arms in circulation among the civilian population.

Strengthening the capacities of institutions with responsibility for security and justice:

- The national police force (PNB) needs to have fewer officers, and those retained should be better trained and better paid. A smaller workforce would be easier to manage and would make it possible to impose disciplinary sanctions more effectively. If the police were better paid, certain officers would be less tempted to take the risk of supplementing their salary by using their weapon illegally. If officers were better trained, the public at large would have more confidence in the police, and the chances of meeting the objectives of the PNB strategic plan for 2007–17 would be increased. The plan aims to turn the police into a ‘republican, modern, professional, community-based’ institution (Nzosaba, 2008b).
- The fight against the impunity enjoyed by certain perpetrators of acts of violence must become a priority. Victims are often reluctant to press charges due to the costs of taking such action and for fear of reprisals. When the victims have both the courage and the resources to bring a case before the court, they face long delays and the final judgement is often inadequate. In order to combat these obstacles, the police should learn to play a role in the community, judicial structures should be strengthened, and victims assisted when they take action. Perpetrators should be punished in a manner commensurate with the crimes committed.

Reducing the vulnerability of populations at risk:

- Gender-based violence (GBV) has reached worrying levels in Burundi. Awareness-raising must continue to encourage victims to seek treatment, testify, and lodge complaints without fear of social exclusion. The new penal code adopted by Parliament in November 2008 should be a useful tool in the fight against GBV, which has now been stepped up.
- The government has poor control over land transactions, and the resulting abuses can lead to conflict. It is therefore essential to set up a system to make land secure. The creation in March 2008 of an inter-ministerial committee charged with drawing up terms of reference for land reform is a step in the right direction. The National Commission for Land and Other

Assets, which is charged with settling land disputes, urgently needs more resources. Burundians who sought refuge in Tanzania are now coming back on a regular basis, a factor that represents an additional burden.

- Access to health care must be improved without delay. At this writing, many victims of armed violence could not be treated in hospital due to a lack of resources. The public health centres are poorly equipped and are in need of doctors. If not treated properly, wounds resulting from violence have serious after-effects, with dramatic human and economic consequences for the victims and their families.

Disarming the civilian population:

- Calls for a programme to disarm civilians have been made repeatedly; the need for disarmament is reconfirmed by the results of this survey. Firearms are used more than any other type of weapon in acts of armed violence, and they have the most tragic consequences for victims: as noted above, Ligue Iteka records for 2007 reveal that one or more deaths occurred as a result of 70 per cent of acts of violence committed with a firearm.
- The household survey shows that the population has a very negative view of weapons, which do not have a cultural or traditional value in Burundi (hunting and shooting as a sport are almost unknown). Civilians who have weapons seem to keep them for personal protection. Rebuilding a climate of confidence will be a long and delicate process. It may be facilitated if a peace agreement can be concluded with the last rebel group in operation, if the members of this group can be included in existing institutions, and if the climate of civil war, which mobilizes the army and endangers the populations of the regions concerned, can be brought to an end.
- The Burundians surveyed say almost unanimously that they are ready to take part in a disarmament programme (more than 95 per cent of respondents replied ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ to this question). This figure is close to the one recorded in 2005, which shows that the window of opportunity that existed three years ago, when the new government was enjoying what might be called a ‘grace period’, is still open. The disarmament of civilians is therefore still on the agenda, in spite of lower levels of confidence in the government and a higher degree of political uncertainty due to the prospect of elections in 2010.
- When disarmament of the civilian population takes place, particular importance will have to be given to the collection of grenades, of which civilians own many, and which pose grave risks to their owners and to

potential targets (they are often stored in houses in an advanced state of deterioration, which means there is a serious risk of accidental detonation). Grenades have the same dissuasive and coercive powers as firearms but cost less and have the capacity to kill or wound many people simultaneously.

- Finally, any disarmament programme must also take account of differences between Bujumbura, the only truly urban centre in Burundi, and the other provinces. According to the survey, the people of Bujumbura-Mairie, who see weapons more as a means of protection than do people in the other provinces, would be particularly sensitive to ‘inclusive disarmament’, i.e. disarmament targeting the whole population. These differences between town and country must also be taken into account when the incentives to be offered to participants in exchange for their weapons (goods or money) are chosen. More often than elsewhere, the surveyed respondents in Bujumbura-Mairie cited unemployment and the lack of opportunities for young people as the main problems affecting their neighbourhood or *colline*. Respondents in other provinces complained mainly about the lack of public transport and problems associated with land.⁶

Notes

- 1 Sources used by the Observatory of Armed Violence include private and public radios (RTNB, RP, RSF-Bonesha, Isanganiro, and Radio France Internationale), local and international print media (ABP, Net Press, Burundi Réalités, Agence France Press, @ribnews, Panapress, and ReliefWeb), BINUB security reports, and the Ligue Iteka Web site.
- 2 This rate assumes that Burundi has a population of 8.5 million. In comparison, the average homicide rate worldwide (committed with or without a weapon) is 7.6 per 100,000 persons (Geneva Declaration, 2008, p. 5).
- 3 It is more socially acceptable for a child to seek medical or psychological help than for an adult to do so.
- 4 UNDP figures for 2007.
- 5 IMF figures for 2007.
- 6 The six provinces surveyed are, however, unanimous in decrying the problems of criminality and lack of infrastructure.