



United Nations
Development Programme

Armed Violence in Asia and the Pacific: An Overview of the Causes, Costs and Consequences



Contents

1 Introduction	2
2 Defining and Understanding Armed Violence	3
3 Armed Conflict in Asia and the Pacific	4
4 Non-Conflict Armed Violence in Asia and the Pacific	11
5 Responses to Armed Violence	17
6 Conclusion	19
7 Suggested Readings	20

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Briefing paper

1 Introduction

As the world's largest continent with roughly three fifths of the population, Asia¹ is characterised by an array of governance practices, economic performance, cultural traditions, ethnic groups, religions, and languages. It is resident to some of the poorest countries on the globe (e.g. Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste²), some of the fastest growing economies (e.g. Thailand, Vietnam, China and India), and a number of wealthy populations (e.g. Singapore, South Korea and Japan).³ Asia is one of the least urbanized continents, with roughly 38 percent of the population expected to be living in urban areas by 2020 compared to a world average of 47 percent.⁴ Given this wide variation in contexts, it is not surprising that Asian countries experience armed violence in different forms and at distinct rates.

This background paper presents a general overview of the risks and effects of armed violence in Asia. After issuing a broad definition of armed violence it disaggregates the phenomenon into two categories: 'armed conflict' and armed violence emanating from 'non-conflict' contexts including criminality, urban gang activity, and factors tied to gender relations. The paper then focuses in detail on the issue of armed violence arising from armed conflicts – particularly its causes and impacts. The next section shifts the focus to armed violence arising in non-conflict contexts, including a discussion of its associated risk factors and negatives effects on development. The final section of the paper considers the broad array of armed violence reduction initiatives underway in Asia.

Some of the key findings include:

- Asia currently has the highest incidence of armed conflicts in the world. Many of these armed conflicts are protracted and have lasted decades. Due in part to their longevity but also a result of the associated consequences of armed violence, they continue to impose tremendous costs to governments and societies in which they occur, but also to neighbours.
- Although Asia, has the lowest reported (average) rate of homicidal violence there are considerable variations between sub-regions and countries. For example, several countries exhibit extremely high reported rates of homicide that are cause for concern. Although regrettably 'hidden' from view, widespread domestic violence and violence against women, the deployment of violence by state entities to control populations, and the sheer frequency of simmering communal conflicts indicate the manifold ways in which armed violence presents a challenge to governance and economic development.
- There are a range of recurrent factors that contribute to the escalation and spread of armed violence across Asia. For example, armed conflicts are frequently triggered and exacerbated by territorial disputes, competing claims to land and struggles to expand the range of and access to political rights available to citizens. By way of comparison, non-conflict armed violence is empirically linked to unregulated and rapid urbanization and horizontal and income inequality. Other triggers include disputes between groups over ethnic and religious differences, violent community contestation over resources and land, and in response to limited labour opportunities, and a lack of security provided by public institutions.
- The effects of armed violence on human and economic development are considerable. Specifically, armed violence is costly and these impacts can be measured by accounting for, among other things, intentional fatal and non-fatal injuries, disability-adjusted losses, lost productivity, reduced domestic and foreign direct investment, lost tourism revenue, depleted infrastructure and failing social services. In other words, the costs of armed violence extend beyond households, communities and states to neighbours, creditor countries and others.
- It appears that the costs of non-conflict armed violence may be much higher than conflict-related armed violence. The lack of reliable and comprehensive surveillance and survey data prevents a more sophisticated accounting of the incidence, risk factors and discrete costs to societies. But while the costs of armed violence emerging from armed conflict are high, the costs imposed by non-conflict-

1 For the purposes of this paper Asia is divided into the following sub-regions: Central Asia, South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.

2 UNDP Human Development Index 2007. Nepal ranked 142 out of 177, PNG ranked 145, and Timor-Leste ranked 150.

3 The Economic Times, 'India, China to be APAC's fastest growing economies,' 8 April 2008.

4 UN Habitat, Tools and Statistics Unit. Global Trends: Asia. <http://www2.unhabitat.org/habrdd/asia.html>.

related armed violence are likely to be dramatically higher still. Focusing on developing systematic collection of data on non-conflict armed violence will assist Asian governments in prioritizing their prevention and reduction efforts and mitigating the negative effects on development.

- A number of armed violence prevention and reduction interventions have been launched at the national and local levels in Asia. While these efforts are encouraging, the framing of armed violence narrowly as 'terrorism' rather than, say, a public health challenge may unintentionally obscure the underlying risk factors for armed violence and divert attention and resources away from effective entry points. While states have commonly responded to armed violence with crack-down operations and enforcement in the past, there is a growing recognition across Asia of the value and cost-effectiveness of alternative approaches to redressing armed violence in the region. Some of these approaches include designing safer cities through environmental design and providing sustainable alternatives to, or better management of, sprawling slum cities. Others include voluntary weapons collection and destruction programmes, as well as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) interventions and security sector reform (SSR). Ultimately, effective interventions are context and data-driven, locally-owned, and capitalise on the local ingenuity and skills of Asians.

2 Defining and Understanding Armed Violence

No universal definition exists for armed violence. For the purpose of this background paper, armed violence can be described as:

*the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community or state, which undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development.*⁵

It is important to note that not all uses of force are illegitimate. International norms recognize the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force. However, states are bound by international law, human rights principles, and national laws as to how they can exercise the right to use 'legitimate' force. Any use of force that exceeds what is deemed legitimate by these international and national frameworks, can therefore be considered 'illegitimate.'

Armed violence, as a broad category, is often separated into two main types: conflict and non-conflict armed violence. Within these two categories exists various types of armed violence (see Table 1), all of which occur to some extent in Asia.

Table 1 Different types of armed violence

Type of Armed Violence	Examples
Armed Conflict Violence	
• State based conflict	Civil war
• Non-state based conflict	Communal clashes, inter-group fighting
• Political violence	Organized armed violence by the state against civilians
• Terrorism*	Indiscriminate killing of civilians
Non-Conflict Armed Violence	
• Criminal violence	Homicide, assault
• Gang violence	Inter-gang clashes, drive-by shootings
• Self-directed violence	Suicide
• Domestic violence	Child and spouse abuse
• Gender-based violence	Violence against women

* Note: Terrorist activities can take place in both conflict and non-conflict settings

This typology is not comprehensive, it aims to demonstrate the wide variety of acts included in the discussion of 'armed violence.' While such a typology of armed violence can provide insights into the actors involved,

5 Geneva Declaration, 'Armed Violence Prevention and Reduction: A Challenge for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Background Note,' April 2008. Available at <<http://www.genevadeclaration.org>>

both perpetrators and victims, and potentially the scope of the armed violence, the demarcation of armed violence into discrete forms is not only difficult to do, but it also hides the commonalities that underlie many types of armed violence. Treating each form of armed violence separately can hinder the design of comprehensive strategies for armed violence prevention and reduction and impede the development of coherent international, national, and local policies and programming.

Data Limitations

An important constraint on fully understanding the extent of armed violence in Asia and trends over the past several years is the lack of reliable data on violent phenomena. Although data is more widely available on large scale armed conflicts, enabling the graphing of trends over time, non-conflict armed violence on the other hand has limited data available for both the amount and effects of it in Asia. Unlike in Africa,⁶ there has been no regional study of the costs of conflict and armed violence, and information for individual countries is not always easy to obtain, and the costs of armed violence remain difficult to estimate.⁷

Information about non-conflict armed violence can be generated through such sources as national surveillance systems, household surveys, interviews, and media reports. National surveillance systems to capture information about rates of mortality and morbidity, and the risk factors that contribute to both, exist in Asia, with effective systems in place in Australia, New Zealand, India, Korea and Singapore, as well as newly developed systems in Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia,⁸ Vietnam, and the Philippines. Not all of these collection efforts include information about the rate, nature, and extent of armed violence because they do not disaggregate deaths by cause, or do not disaggregate beyond the homicide category. Other countries have not been able to implement national surveillance systems for various reasons (including, insecurity, lack of resources and conflict). A number of factors inhibit the collection of such data: lack of resources or capacity to collect and analyse the data, insufficient understanding of the importance and utility of such data, and ongoing insecurity or conflict making it difficult to implement surveillance systems. The collection, analysis and use of this data is an important component in targeting armed violence reduction efforts at those factors responsible for the high incidence of armed violence.

3 Armed Conflict in Asia and the Pacific

Armed conflict is described here as the use of organized armed violence between two parties over contested issues of governance and/or territory. This includes both interstate and intrastate wars. Armed conflict in Asia, as in the rest of the world, has been predominantly intrastate in nature since the 1990s. The overall number of armed conflicts around the globe declined between 1999 and 2002, and has held steady at around 30 active conflicts each year since 2002 (see Table 2). The number of ongoing armed conflicts in Asia increased slightly between 2002 and 2005, offsetting some of the gains made in Africa, with these trends looking to remain relatively steady in 2006 and 2007.⁹ In 2006, there were at least eight ongoing armed conflicts in Asia.¹⁰

6 IANSA, Oxfam and Saferworld, *Africa's Missing Billions*, 2007.

7 WHO, *The economic dimensions of interpersonal violence*, Geneva: WHO, 2004; WHO is also releasing a handbook for costing violence in May 2008. *Manual for estimating the economic costs of injuries due to interpersonal and self-directed violence*. Geneva: WHO.

8 See for example the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2005, available at <<http://statsnis.org/SURVEYS/CDHS2005/Table1.htm>>.

9 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/>, accessed in April 2008.

10 Data from Project Ploughshares, *Armed Conflict in 2006*, available at <<http://www.ploughshares.ca/images/articles/ACR07/MapRe-vACR07.pdf>>. Ploughshares uses a definition of armed conflict that has a higher battle death threshold than is used in the dataset in Table 2, suggesting that this figure of 8 conflicts in 2006 might be low.

Table 2 Armed Conflicts by Region, 2002-2005

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	13	7	8	5
Americas	2	1	3	2
Asia, Central and South	7	10	10	9
Asia, East, Southeast and Pacific	5	5	4	7
Europe	1	1	1	1
Middle East and North Africa	4	6	6	7
All regions	32	30	32	31

Note: Armed conflicts are those that take place between the government and at least one organized armed group.
Source: Human Security Briefing 2006, p. 7

Many Asian countries have experienced some form of armed conflict over the past three decades. Interstate conflict is extremely rare. The only active interstate conflict is that between Pakistan and India, while the conflict between North and South Korea remains at a stalemate. The conflict in Afghanistan involves the participation of other state militaries, and therefore may be described best as an internationalized intrastate conflict. The remaining ongoing armed conflicts in Asia are intrastate in nature.

Over two dozen countries have been involved in intrastate armed conflicts between government forces and at least one armed non-state group over this period. Examples include Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia.¹¹ Some of these armed conflicts have lasted decades and proven extremely resistant to efforts at resolution, including those in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines, all of which remain unresolved to date.

Intrastate armed conflict is rarely a continuous phenomenon. Instead, intrastate conflicts tend to follow a cycle of low- and high-intensity warfare, with the low-intensity stages lasting far longer than the high-intensity stages. The majority of intrastate conflicts in Asia are of low-intensity, below the 'war' threshold of 1,000 battle deaths per year,¹² including those in the Philippines and Myanmar.

Likewise armed conflicts do not always involve all parts of a country, but may be localized to specific geographical areas or to the front lines between forces or areas that border between two ethnic or religious groups. In the Philippines, conflict is largely contained within the southern provinces, and in particular Mindanao and the surrounding areas. In Sri Lanka the conflict has been mainly fought in the north and east of the country. In Afghanistan, conflict had been a problem mainly in the south where the Taliban has a strong presence and where poppy cultivation (and the related drug trade) is common, but the conflict-related armed violence has expanded into the cities from the provinces, and into the east and west of the country.¹³

In addition to intrastate conflict, three other types of armed conflict should be mentioned here. The first is communal armed violence. In some instances, armed conflict does not involve the government as a participant to the conflict. Instead, armed conflict takes place between communities. This communal armed violence often involves family or clan feuds or clashes between groups over resources or territory.

The second type is politically-motivated armed violence, which is common in a number of Asian countries. This kind of armed violence involves the use of organized armed force for primarily political ends, including by or against the state and state officials. Such armed violence can result from the inability of the state to respond appropriately to political protests. It can also occur in the context of responding to armed attacks, especially in the context of terrorism.

The third type is interstate disputes over territorial claims. This last type of armed conflict is not yet a reality, but remains a high risk. Examples of this include the 'territorial dispute in the Sulawesi Sea between Malaysia and Indonesia, a dispute between South Korea and Japan over the Tokdo/Takeshima islets, and growing tensions between China and Japan over potentially energy-rich territory in the East China Sea.¹⁴

11 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/>, accessed in April 2008.

12 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/graphs/intensity_year_asia.pdf, accessed in April 2008.

13 IRIN, 'Humanitarian needs growing as conflict spreads – ICRC', 27 April 2008.

14 Chietigj Bajpae, 'The price of Asian conflict', *Asia Times*, 24 May 2005.

Causes and Risk Factors of Armed Conflict

In Asia, the majority of the armed conflicts in the region are fought over issues of territory, political control, and political rights. Conflicts erupt over the struggle for control of the state, and can include both efforts to overthrow the ruling regime as well as attempts at secession. Conflicts also result from widespread grievances about governance and various racial, ethnic, and religious discriminatory practices and policies. Such conflicts are often characterized as struggles over religion and ethnicity, which aim to alter the political policies and programmes in place, which are often discriminatory towards minority ethnic or religious groups.

Factors that elevate the risk of armed conflict include: economic inequality, discriminatory policies and programmes against minority groups, high levels of grievances over time, popular perceptions of governments failing to address grievances, strong-handed policies towards dissenting public opinion, lack of personal freedoms, the availability of arms, the availability of financing for insurgencies (e.g. drug trade, natural resources), the ineffectiveness of government military forces, supportive regional neighbours, weak governance outside the main cities, and the presence of a leader or group capable of mobilizing individuals to military action. While these factors are not unique to Asia, they are nevertheless important driving forces behind many conflicts in Asia.

Impacts of Armed Conflict

Armed conflicts exact a high toll on communities ranging from death and disability to a wide range of effects on the population (e.g. disease, displacement), economic losses, infrastructure destruction, governance depletion, and the decline in law and order. Measuring the extent of these effects remains a herculean task. While it is widely accepted that wars impose high costs, no exact figures exist to measure the final toll for any country. The following provides some details of the various costs imposed by armed conflict in Asia.

Direct and indirect deaths

Armed conflicts produce numerous direct deaths – to those engaged in the fighting or caught in the middle of the war – as well as what is widely believed to be a much larger number of indirect deaths – resulting from malnutrition, disease, lack of shelter, lack of health care and other services, and lack of clean water due to the ongoing war. Several institutions have tried to produce estimates of the number of deaths resulting directly from conflict; however the estimates can vary widely across datasets (see Table 3), and are likely to underreport deaths with the actual number being two to four times higher than that reported.

Table 3 Direct Conflict Deaths, Asia-Pacific, 2005-2007¹⁵

Region	Country	2005		2006		2007	
		IISS	Uppsala	IISS	Uppsala	IISS	Uppsala
Central Asia	n/a ¹	180	--	20	--	8	--
South Asia	Afghanistan	1400	1267	3890	3146	4950	5818
	Bangladesh	40	--	35	--	17	--
	India ²	1397	1369	1296	900	1946	1173
	India-Pakistan	1710	--	1116	--	2826	--
	Nepal	1840	1366	528	418	143	0
	Pakistan	867	55	3255	198	4122	--
	Sri Lanka	280	85	4126	1969	4406	--
East and Southeast Asia	Indonesia	180	213	25	0	35	--
	Myanmar	600	105	365	158	407	129
	Philippines	330	418	332	356	416	394
	Thailand	580	204	278	213	452	--
	Timor-Leste	52	--	33	--	85	--

¹ IISS provides a figure for the region as a whole

² Figures do not include the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir

-- indicates no number reported for that year

* No direct conflict deaths were reported in the Pacific during 2005-2007 in these databases

Sources: IISS and Uppsala conflict databases, accessed April 2008

15 Uppsala defines armed conflict as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year." The IISS database covers international and internal armed conflicts, as well as terrorism. International armed border and territorial conflict is defined as "involving governments in armed conflict over sovereignty and territory." Internal armed conflict is defined as "taking place between government forces and organized groups, which control sufficient territory to sustain concerted military operations. These conflicts can sometimes spill across international borders without being considered international conflicts between state parties." The threshold for inclusion in the database is zero battle-related deaths.

Table 3 depicts two of several databases that offer estimates of direct conflict deaths (those killed directly by conflict activities). These figures provide an overview of the estimates of mortality in a number of conflicts, and suggest a few trends: several armed conflicts incur significant numbers of direct conflict deaths (e.g. Afghanistan, India, India-Pakistan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka); some armed conflicts have escalated dramatically over the past few years (e.g. Afghanistan and Sri Lanka), while others have dramatically declined in direct deaths (e.g. Nepal and Indonesia); and, some armed conflicts appear to continue at a relatively consistent rate (e.g. Myanmar and the Philippines).

While these numbers may not seem significant in individual countries, for example in India far more people are killed in traffic accidents per year than in armed violence, the effects of conflict deaths are broader than just the numbers. Unlike in traffic accidents, conflict deaths are often accompanied by high levels of insecurity, displacement, the avoidance of certain activities or locations, and psychosocial stress and trauma, all of which can have significant negative impacts on development. In 2005, Asia overtook the Middle East as the region with the most direct conflict deaths.

Table 4 Direct Conflict Deaths, by Region, 2002-2005¹⁶

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	4,741	3,427	2,914	1,851
Americas	1,200	518	1,478	1,106
Asia, Central and South	5,292	3,094	3,924	4,186
Asia, East, Southeast and Pacific	851	1,630	1,236	978
Europe	753	480	1,151	668
Middle East and North Africa	2,885	11,183	6,231	3,250
All regions	15,722	20,332	16,934	12,039

Source: Human Security Brief 2006, p. 8

In addition to deaths resulting directly from combat, indirect deaths are also numerous. These include deaths from disease and malnutrition, which often result from a lack of health care provision, poor housing and living conditions, and lack of access to food and clean water.¹⁷ Indirect deaths have been estimated to be several times higher than the number of deaths resulting directly from conflict. Recent studies suggest that many estimates have greatly under-estimated the indirect costs of war.¹⁸ Post-conflict societies, such as Cambodia, tend to experience higher levels of armed violence due to the inability of the government to provide adequate services or security, as well as increased competition for available resources and land.¹⁹

Armed conflict also produces a high burden of morbidity, creating high health care costs. They can also lead to lifetime disability, imposing an even greater cost on the families who care for the disabled, the economies in which disabled are unable to work, and the governments who are expected to provide assistance to the disabled. Landmines and cluster munitions continue to pose a threat to civilians in Cambodia, Laos, and Afghanistan.²⁰ In Cambodia,²¹ landmines and explosive remnants of war (e.g. cluster munitions) threaten civilians engaging in everyday economic practices of fishing, farming, and herding. Although casualty (injured and killed) figures have dropped from 4,329 in 1996 to 450 in 2006, the majority of those injured by landmines remain civilians (over 95 percent). The majority of those injured survive their injuries. However, most survivors do not have sufficient funds to pay for medical treatment or prostheses to replace lost limbs.

16 These figures include only reported and codable deaths according to the Uppsala/Human Security Centre.

17 WHO, *The economic dimensions of interpersonal violence*, Geneva: WHO, 2004.

18 Oskar NT Thoms and James Ron, 'Public health, conflict and human rights: toward a collaborative research agenda,' *Conflict and Health* Vol. 1, No. 11 (2007).

19 Aldo Benini, Taylor Owen and Håvard Rue, 'A Semi-Parametric Spatial Regression Approach to Post-War Human Security: Cambodia, 2002-2004.' Oslo: Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW), International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), 29 June 2006.

20 Human Rights Watch, 'Cluster Munitions in the Asia-Pacific Region,' CMC Regional Fact Sheet, April 2008, available at <<http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/arms/CMC.ClusterMunitions.Asia-Pacific.2008.pdf>>

21 Discussion of Cambodia is based on International Campaign to Ban Landmines annual reports, 'Landmine Monitor,' 2002-2007.

Displacement

Armed conflicts result in significant disruptions to populations through widespread displacement (see Table 5). In 2006, Asia was home to three million internally displaced persons, with roughly 900,000 of these being newly displaced during the year due to armed violence in Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and the Philippines.²²

Table 5 Displaced Populations by Region, end-2006

Region (UN)	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	IDPs protected/assisted	Stateless persons
Africa	2,607,600	244,100	5,373,000	100,100
Asia	4,537,800	90,100	3,879,100	5,026,900
Europe	1,612,400	244,000	542,200	679,000
Latin America and the Caribbean	40,600	16,200	3,000,000	--
Northern America	995,300	147,800	--	--
Pacific*	84,000	1,700	--	--
Total	9,877,700	743,900	12,794,300	5,806,000

* The UN uses the term 'Oceania' for the Pacific sub-region in its regional statistics

Source: UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2006

Displacement can lead to the disintegration of families through separation, to higher burdens of disease by forcing individuals to live in makeshift homes, and to the imposition of high costs on neighbouring countries who receive large numbers of refugees. In 2006, there were roughly 2.9 million refugees originating from Asian countries.²³

Table 6 Refugee Populations in the Asia-Pacific, end-2006

Country of origin	Number of refugees	Number assisted by UNHCR	Number of refugees returned	Number of IDPs protected by UNHCR*	Estimates of IDPs**
Afghanistan	2,107,519	1,973,948	387,917	129,310	132,000
Australia	29	--	--	--	--
Bangladesh	7,803	20	5,344	--	500,000
Bhutan	108,073	107,803	1,457	--	--
Brunei	2	1	--	--	--
Cambodia	17,965	134	9	--	--
China	140,598	197	1	--	--
Fiji	1,685	--	--	--	--
India	17,811	8	1	--	At least 600,000

22 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006*, 2007, pp. 44-45.

23 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006*, 2007, p. 43.

Country of origin	Number of refugees	Number assisted by UNHCR	Number of refugees returned	Number of IDPs protected by UNHCR*	Estimates of IDPs**
Indonesia	34,728	17,854	--	--	150,000-250,000
Kazakhstan	7,376	75	--	--	--
Kiribati	41	--	--	--	--
Korea, Republic of	1,335	--	--	--	--
Kyrgyzstan	2,488	25	--	--	--
Laos	26,447	359	287	--	--
Malaysia	584	--	--	--	--
Myanmar	202,826	177,469	--	58,500	503,000
Nepal	2,647	98	--	100,000	50,000 – 70,000
New Zealand	8	--	--	--	--
Pakistan	25,639	442	2	--	undetermined
Philippines	886	3	--	--	120,000 – 300,000
Solomon Islands	3	--	--	--	--
Sri Lanka	116,966	187	375	469,165	460,000
Tajikistan	645	27	142	--	--
Thailand	3,325	122	--	--	--
Tibetans	20,184	--	--	--	--
Timor-Leste	251	--	--	155,231	100,000
Tonga	6	--	--	--	--
Turkmenistan	692	12	--	--	undetermined

* Note these are figures of those IDPs provided with protection by UNHCR, these are not the total figures of IDPs in these countries

**These are the most recent estimates for total IDP populations from IDMC (www.internal-displacement.org)

Source: UNCHR, Statistical Yearbook 2006

As Table 6 suggests, displacement often affects low-income countries. The poor and marginalized communities bear the brunt of this disproportionately. Displacement also affects neighbouring countries. Pakistan received nearly two million refugees from Afghanistan in 2000, with roughly half of these remaining in Pakistan in 2006. Thailand has hosted over one hundred thousand refugees from Myanmar since 2000. India hosts a refugee population of some sixty thousand from Sri Lanka.²⁴ While UNHCR provides assistance to many of these refugees, the presence of the refugees requires the provision of land for refugee camps and security for those in and around the camps. In addition to the costs of displacement, imposed on both home and host countries, displacement often contributes to internal conflict and armed violence by increasing the struggle over land and resources and increasing the number of human rights violations perpetrated against the displaced.

24 These figures were drawn from the IISS Database, <<http://www.iiss.org>>, accessed 19 April 2008.

Social and economic impacts

The costs of armed conflict include not only the costs borne by those countries in conflict, but also by those governments and international agencies and organizations that provide assistance both during conflicts and after they end (see Table 7). This assistance can entail the provision of military and peacekeeping assistance, humanitarian aid, development assistance, and reconstruction efforts.

Table 7 Examples of Various Costs of Armed Conflict²⁵

Government	Other Governments	Aid Agencies
Military expenditure	Military expenditure	Humanitarian assistance
Health costs (military)	Peacekeeping	Assistance to IDPs/refugees
Assistance to IDPs	Hosting refugees	Rebuilding housing
Loss of development gains	Humanitarian assistance	Rebuilding health infrastructure
Loss of foreign investment	Reconstruction	
Loss of national revenue	Peace-building	

Using the United Nations peacekeeping missions as one example the costs become quickly apparent.²⁶ The UN spent US\$1.6 billion on the two peacekeeping missions in Cambodia between 1991 and 1993. The UN spent roughly US\$1 billion on two peacekeeping missions in Timor-Leste from 1999 to 2005, but then had to return again in 2006 when fighting resumed, and is now spending US\$153 million in the 2007-2008 fiscal year. This is just a small fraction of the costs involved in conflict management and peace-building, and do not include the substantial amounts contributed by national governments or by donor states, humanitarian organizations, and other non-governmental organizations.

One method of estimating the costs of refugees is to compare the number of refugees to the GDP per capita of a host country (to estimate the resources available), the population of the host country, and the land size of the host country (to estimate the space available).²⁷ The impact of hosting refugees is felt most significantly by those with limited resources available to provide assistance and protection. Based on GDP figures, African and Asian countries, the majority of which have low GDP per capita, face tremendous challenges in hosting refugees. In 2006 Pakistan, which hosts the largest refugee population in the world, ranked second highest by GDP comparison with 421 refugees per US\$1 GDP per capita, an improvement over 522 refugees per US\$1 in 2005.²⁸ These economic costs are slightly offset by Pakistan's large population, which is presumed to be able to absorb refugees more easily, but compounded by land availability, which is more limited.

Not all effects can be represented in monetary figures. Communities experience a wide range of negative effects from armed conflict that are difficult to quantify. These include displacement – both as internally displaced and as refugees – the breakdown of family and community ties, and the physical and psychological consequences of experiencing war. Armed conflict often leads to the destruction of physical infrastructure (e.g. homes, workshops, roads, water supply, sanitation systems, and electricity), the decline of government services, and the reduction in health services and educational opportunities. Armed conflict imposes negative effects on the economy, including limited economic opportunities during conflict and post-conflict periods, a lack of sustainable jobs, limited agricultural activities, falling foreign direct investment, drastically reduced tourism-based revenue, loss of export production and import capacity, and capital flight and “brain-drain.”

25 Based on Elisabeth Sköns, The Costs of Conflict, Paper prepared for the International Task Force on Global Public Goods, 7 October 2004, located at <http://www.gpgtaskforce.org/uploads/files/85.doc>; and Jo Boyden, Jo de Berry, Thomas Feeny, and Jason Hart, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict in South Asia: A review of trends and issues identified through secondary research,” RSC Working Paper No. 7, Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, January 2002

26 Costs taken from UN peacekeeping websites located on the UN website <<http://www.un.org>>

27 UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2006, 2007, pp. 75-80.

28 UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2006, 2007, p. 77.

Table 8 Examples of Effects of Armed Conflict²⁹

Psychological effects	Physical Effects	Economic Effects
Psychological trauma	Destroyed infrastructure	Decline in government revenue
Separation of families	Lack of government services	Decline in exports/imports
Disintegration of communities	Lack of social services (e.g. health care and education)	Reduced employment opportunities
Living in fear	War remnants (e.g. landmines)	Loss of available labour pool

Afghanistan³⁰ provides a clear example of the challenges of meeting the needs of the population during conflict. Insecurity and armed violence reached record levels in this country with the average number of violent incidents per month increasing from 425 in 2006 to 550 in 2007, resulting in over 8,000 persons killed in conflict-related violence. The armed conflict has substantially altered the ways of life in Afghanistan. The Taliban increased its attacks on schools, educators, and students three-fold in an effort to prevent students from attending schools. The strategy has worked: producing high levels of insecurity, provoking the closure of numerous schools, and convincing many students to stay home from school. Armed violence threatens to reverse progress made on improving education and literacy levels in the country. Shops are increasingly closed or empty and streets that once bustled with life are deserted as citizens alter their patterns to avoid those areas most prone to violent attacks.

4 Non-Conflict Armed Violence in Asia and the Pacific

Globally, violence kills more than 500,000 people annually, with most of this violence taking place in developing countries, and much of this violence being perpetrated with firearms. Non-conflict armed violence covers a wide spectrum of cases, ranging from homicide and assault, to domestic and gender-based violence, to gang clashes, and suicide. In some cases these acts are carried out with firearms, while in many other cases other methods (e.g. bladed weapons, blunt instruments) are used. In all cases, the common denominator is the intentional use of an instrument to inflict injury and/or death.

Compared to other regions of the world, on average, Asia as a region has the lowest reported rate of homicide. Even when the Pacific is added, the reported rate remains well below the world average. Within the Asia region, sub-regions demonstrate variation in the reported levels of homicides, from a high of 6.7 per 100,000 in Central Asia to a low of 2.6 per 100,000 in East Asia.³¹

Table 9 Regional Homicide Rates (per 100,000)

Region	Homicide rate
Africa	21.8
Americas	17.6
World	7.9
Europe	5.4
Pacific*	4.0
Asia	3.1

* The UN uses the term 'Oceania' for the Pacific sub-region in its regional statistics
Source: Geneva Declaration, Global Burden of Armed Violence Report, Forthcoming

29 UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2006, 2007, p. 77.

30 This discussion of Afghanistan is based on: IRIN, 'Over half the population at risk of malaria – Health Ministry', 27 April 2008; IRIN, 'Humanitarian needs growing as conflict spreads – ICRC', 27 April 2008; and Small Arms Survey, 2008, Chapter 7.

31 Source: Geneva Declaration, Global Burden of Armed Violence Report, Forthcoming

The reported rates of firearm violence, homicide and suicide, in Asia remains far below the world average (see Table 10). These reported rates are much lower than the average overall reported homicide rates, which include all homicides not just those committed with firearms. This suggests that firearms may not be the preferred weapon to commit non-conflict armed violence in many Asian countries, but such low reported figures could also result from under-reporting, limited surveillance capacity, political interests, local cultural practices regarding burial after death, and other factors.

Table 10 Regional Firearm Homicide and Suicide Rates (per 100,000)³²

Region	Firearm homicide	Firearm suicide
Latin America and the Caribbean	15.47	1.12
Africa	5.90	0.59
North America	3.50	5.52
Central and Eastern Europe	3.09	1.41
Middle East	1.89	0.06
Southeast Asia	1.45	0.10
Asia Pacific	0.54	0.39
Western Europe	0.35	1.66
Worldwide	3.14	0.81

Source: Small Arms Survey, 2004, pp. 199-200

A 2002 study³³ revealed important trends in violence in Asia. Unintentional injuries resulting in death were more common than death due to intentional injuries, except in the Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. Intentional injuries resulting in death outnumbered self-inflicted injuries (suicide) in all countries, although in a number of countries, including Laos, Singapore, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, the number of deaths caused by suicide neared the number due to intentional injuries. Deaths resulting from suicide, however, often outnumbered violence-related deaths, in particular in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.³⁴

Despite the low reported rate of homicide in Asia as a whole, high reported homicide rates in a number of countries (see Table 15) and high levels of domestic violence (see Table 11) suggest that non-conflict armed violence is an important, but under reported, problem that requires further study and attention. These numbers also suggest that non-conflict armed violence is more concentrated in the poorer countries of Asia. Reported homicide rates are particularly low in the higher income countries (e.g. Australia, Brunei), whereas they are much higher in lower income countries (e.g. Mongolia and Papua New Guinea). This has important consequences: non-conflict armed violence occurs most frequently in those countries least capable of responding to the violence, and in those populations least able to absorb the costs.

Violence against women

While violence against women is a common phenomenon in Asia, it remains a largely private matter addressed through the family, rather than through external intervention by law enforcement or other officials. As such, gathering official statistics on violence against women remains difficult, especially in situations where women are unwilling or unable to report violence to the police.

32 Additional details on the regional divisions, the derivation of these estimates, and the datasets used can be found in Small Arms Survey, 2004, Appendix 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, pp. 199-204.

33 World Health Organization, *World report on violence and health*, Geneva: WHO, 2002.

34 The comparative rates in this paragraph are drawn from the World Health Organization dataset, 'Mortality by External Causes for WHO Member States in 2002', available at <<http://www.who.int/entity/healthinfo/statistics/bodgbddeathdalyestimates.xls>>

Violence against women includes a range of acts, such as rape, intimate partner violence, homicide, and physical and psychological abuse. Studies have begun the process of highlighting the problem of domestic violence in Asia. In one study conducted by the World Health Organization a surprising number of participants reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse (see Table 11).

Table 11 Selected Reports of Domestic Violence by Intimate Partner in Asia

Site	Physical violence		Sexual Violence		Physical or Sexual violence or both	
	Ever (%)	Current ¹ (%)	Ever (%)	Current ¹ (%)	Ever (%)	Current ¹ (%)
Bangladesh city	39.7	19.0	37.4	20.2	53.4	30.2
Bangladesh province	41.7	15.8	49.7	24.2	61.7	31.9
Japan city	12.9	3.1	6.2	1.3	15.4	3.8
Samoa	40.5	17.9	19.5	11.5	46.1	22.4
Thailand city	22.9	7.9	29.9	17.1	41.1	21.3
Thailand province	33.8	13.4	28.9	15.6	47.4	22.9

¹ At least one act of violence in the 12 months prior to the interview

Source: WHO, *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women*, 2005

Domestic violence, sexual violence and rape are common across Asia.³⁵ Human trafficking and violence by state officials against women are common to countries in South and Southeast Asia, while female infanticide is common to countries in East and South Asia. Specific types of violence are particular to South Asia, including honour killings, dowry murder, bride burning, burying women alive, and acid attacks. Violence by state officials, human trafficking, sexual violence, and domestic violence can involve the use of a firearm, or the threat of the use of a firearm, while many other forms of violence against women involve other methods.

Causes and Risk Factors of Non-Conflict Armed Violence

A number of common risk factors raise the probability of non-conflict armed violence. These include age, gender, geographical location, level of economic inequality, density of population, the presence of gangs, and the availability of alcohol, drugs, and weapons (see Table 12). Demographically, young men, ages 15-29, are the primary perpetrators of non-conflict armed violence worldwide, and the primary victims of it, except for the case of domestic and gender-based violence which disproportionately affect women.

Low-income countries experience higher death rates due to non-conflict armed violence than high-income countries. High levels of economic inequality contribute by exacerbating grievances and limiting the opportunities of those at the bottom of the salary scale to earn a living through non-violent means.

High population density also contributes to non-conflict armed violence by increasing the number of persons living in close proximity to one another and by escalating the struggle for scarce resources (e.g. housing, employment). Urbanization often results in higher population density as well as larger proportions of city dwellers living in slum-like conditions, where the competition for resources is stiff, and police presence is not common. The presence of firearms and the abuse of drugs and alcohol also increase the likelihood of non-conflict armed violence.

35 This paragraph is based on Jasna Lazarevic, 'Background paper on violence against women in Asia', Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008

Table 12 Social and Community Risk Factors for Non-Conflict Armed Violence

Community	Society
Groups engaged in drug trade	Proximity to drug trade
Weapons in circulation	Availability of weapons
Existence of gangs	History of violence and/or crime
High homicide/crime rates	Cultural norms enabling violence
Limited police presence	Poor rule of law
Social isolation	Strong cultural or ethnic identities
Lack of economic opportunities	Social, political and economic inequality
High population density	Heterogeneity (large minority/majority groups)
Lack of access to social services	Ineffective social institutions
High residential mobility	Discriminatory policies and practices
High unemployment	Low economic development

While these risk factors relate to non-conflict armed violence globally, they are likely contributing factors in Asia as well, but the lack of data on the 'extent, trends, and specific causes' in Asia makes it difficult to identify the most important factors.³⁶ The available, albeit limited, number of studies on non-conflict armed violence in Asia suggests that certain factors may play a contributing role.

In a study comparing Dhaka, Bangladesh with Phnom Penh, Cambodia, key factors contributing to urban armed violence included poverty, dense living conditions, unemployment, and the inability of government to provide security.³⁷ These factors are attributed to the rapid population growth in Asia over the past several decades and the related expansion of urban areas.

A study of Papua New Guinea identified the home and the local community as the principal locations for non-conflict armed violence, with domestic violence, inter-group fighting, armed assault, armed robbery, and homicide being the most common violent events.³⁸ The study also revealed the main causes included community-wide problems of access to economic benefits, inequitable resource distribution, and state failure to provide basic services or law and order, as well as individual factors including unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, financial difficulties, and family problems.

Another important risk factor often cited in non-conflict armed violence is the availability (and possession) of firearms. There are enormous challenges to establishing verifiable and quantified estimates of the numbers of illicit firearms circulating in the region. While government statistics of seizures offer one source of data on the issue, they represent only one part of the picture, and are likely to widely underestimate the scale of illicit trafficking. Estimates of civilian possession of firearms (see Table 13) suggest that firearms are in circulation and available in most countries, but at different rates.

36 Asian Development Bank, NPRS-PRF, 'The Rising Tide of Violence in Asia's Cities', July 2007, <<http://www.adb.org/Documents/PRF/knowledge-products/Rising-Tide-Violence.pdf>>

37 Asian Development Bank, NPRS-PRF, 'The Rising Tide of Violence in Asia's Cities', July 2007, <<http://www.adb.org/Documents/PRF/knowledge-products/Rising-Tide-Violence.pdf>>

38 Nicole Haley and Robert Muggah, 'Jumping the gun? Reflections on armed violence in Papua New Guinea', *African Security Review* 15:2 (2004).

Table 13 Estimates of Civilian Holdings of Firearms

Region	Country	Population (2003)	Civilian Possession*	Firearms per 100 residents**	Law Enforcement Firearms	Armed Forces' firearms
Central Asia	Kazakhstan	15,185,000	200,000	1	70,000	700000
	Kyrgyzstan	5,146,000	45,000	1	31000	160000
	Tajikistan	6,300,000	65,000	1	255000	--
	Turkmenistan	4,900,000	790,000	16	14000	60000
	Uzbekistan	25,600,000	1,200,000	5	96000	115000
South Asia	Afghanistan	28,800,000	1,500,000	5	70000	75000
	Bangladesh	138,000,000	700,000	1	453,000	266,000
	Bhutan	2,300,000	39,000	2	--	--
	India	1,064,000,000	46,000,000	4	4,500,000	4000000
	Maldives	330,000	6,000	2	--	--
	Nepal	24,700,000	160,000	1	87000	140000
	Pakistan	148,400,000	18,000,000	12	820000	2400000
	Sri Lanka	19,200,000	300,000	2	179,000	300000
East and Southeast Asia	China	1,288,400,000	40,000,000	3	3300000	20000000
	Japan	127,200,000	710,000	1	335000	700000
	North Korea	22,600,000	130,000	1	324000	25000000
	South Korea	47,900,000	510,000	1	130000	12000000
	Mongolia	24,800,000	31,500	1	17000	450000
	Brunei	360,000	5,400	2	--	--
	Cambodia	13,400,000	450,000	3	94000	90000
	Timor-Leste	950,000	21,000	2	--	--
	Indonesia	214,500,000	1,000,000	1	390000	2100000
	Laos	5,700,000	54,000	1	16000	110000
	Malaysia	24,800,000	370,000	1	122000	400000
	Myanmar	47,400,000	2,000,000	4	70000	530000
	Philippines	81,500,000	3,900,000	5	164000	470000
	Singapore	4,300,000	22,000	1	17000	520000
	Thailand	62,000,000	10,000,000	16	203000	1800000
	Vietnam	81,300,000	1,100,000	1	286000	11600000
Pacific	Australia	19,900,000	3,050,000	15	61000	220000
	Fiji	840,000	4,000	1	28000	20000
	New Zealand	4,000,000	925,000	23	10000	44000
	Papua New Guinea	5,500,000	71,000	1	8800	5000
	Solomon Islands	480,000	1,000	1	2000	0

*Note: Estimates of civilian possession do not include possession by armed non-state combatants, and do not necessarily include illegally held weapons.

** Note: Number rounded to whole number. Those countries with rates between 0 and 1 have been rounded up to 1.

Source: A. Karp, 2008

A few additional comments are needed for Table 13. First, it is important to note that these figures are estimates of civilian possession, and do not necessarily include illegally held firearms. In countries such as Australia and New Zealand, illegal firearms rates are likely to be low given the existing laws and their enforcement. In many other countries, the lack of legislation, registration, and/or enforcement relating to civilian possession could account for low reported rates of possession. In addition, these figures do not include possession by non-state armed groups.

Second, it is important to note that despite the rates of civilian possession indicated here, possession is not evenly distributed throughout populations. Firearms possession tends to be more concentrated in high-income countries (i.e. single individuals possess more than one firearm) and more dispersed in low-income countries, where individuals often have a single firearm.

Third, there is no direct correlation between civilian possession and homicide rates. Many of the Central Asian countries have low civilian possession rates, but relatively high reported homicide rates, except for Turkmenistan which rates high on both scales. Likewise, the estimated civilian possession rate is high in Pakistan, but Pakistan has an extremely low reported rate of homicide.

Fourth, high levels of government stocks can pose concerns over the leakage of firearms into the hands of civilians, either through theft or through corruption, especially in low-income countries that lack the proper safeguards and inventory mechanisms to maintain the security of their stocks.

Governments face numerous challenges in trying to address the illicit trade in firearms. These include poor law enforcement capacity, weak stockpile management, porous and unevenly patrolled borders, the topological nature of countries (e.g. islands, jungles, mountains, long borders) that make surveillance difficult, and the continuing demand for arms.

Impacts of Non-Conflict Armed Violence

As with armed conflict, non-conflict armed violence also imparts a number of negative effects on communities. These effects include death and injury, displacement, and a number of social and economic costs.

Mortality and morbidity

The primary effects of non-conflict armed violence are death and injury. Although the overall reported homicide rate in Asia is low, homicide rates vary widely across the region and within the sub-regions (see Table 14).³⁹

Table 14 Homicide Rates (per 100,000) in Asia, 1998-2004

Country	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Australia	1.52	1.81	1.57	--	--	1.53	1.31
Brunei	--	--	--	--	--	0.56	1.43
Hong Kong	0.95	0.86	0.56	--	--	0.73	0.65
Indonesia	0.86	1.01	1.05	--	--	--	--
Kazakhstan*	--	--	--	--	14.39*	16.53*	17.47*
Korea, Republic of	2.10	2.12	2.02	--	--	2.19	2.20
Kyrgyzstan	8.86	8.90	8.40	--	8.2*	8.15	8.20
Maldives	--	--	--	2.50	2.79	1.28	--
Malaysia	2.83	2.59	2.36	--	--	--	--
Mongolia	--	--	--	--	--	13.51	13.13
Myanmar	--	--	--	0.25	0.19	--	--
Nepal	--	--	--	2.56	3.42	--	--
New Zealand	1.19	1.05	1.17	1.16	1.29	--	--
Pakistan	0.07	0.05	0.05	--	--	--	--
Papua New Guinea	10.28	8.99	9.06	--	--	--	--
Philippines	8.12	7.69	7.59	7.47	8.20	4.97	4.47
Singapore	0.94	1.01	0.92	--	--	0.57	0.50
Sri Lanka	--	--	--	--	--	6.42	6.81
Tajikistan*	--	--	--	--	4.69*	4.19*	3.37*
Thailand	9.56	8.39	8.47	--	--	--	--
Turkmenistan	--	--	--	--	--	8.79	8.06
Uzbekistan*	--	--	--	--	4.03*	2.77*	3.04*

Note: -- indicates no data in the UNODC survey

Sources: UNODC, Seventh, Eight, and Ninth UN Survey of Crime Trends; * WHO Regional Office for Europe

39 National homicide rates are not available for every country in Asia, nor are they available on a yearly basis.

Social and economic impacts

Non-conflict armed violence also brings with it a number of social and economic costs and effects (see Table 15). It remains difficult task to assess accurately the costs, but is known to inhibit economic development by deterring investment into high crime areas. Violent events and high crime can deter tourism, leading to large losses of revenue in areas and countries that depend heavily on this revenue (e.g. Indonesia (Bali), India, the Maldives, and Thailand). Military activities that target insurgents can negatively affect civilians and the economy, as in Timor-Leste where military restrictions on civilian agriculture threaten an estimated 10,000 tons of coffee, which account for roughly 80 percent of the country's exports and an estimated US\$20 million per year.⁴⁰

Table 15 Examples of the Impacts of Non-Conflict Armed Violence

Costs from Responding to Non-Conflict Armed Violence	Community Effects
Health care costs for injuries	Breakdown of community ties
Police patrols	Breakdown of community organization
Law enforcement activities	Decline in interactions between individuals
Legal processes/court hearings	Rise in fear and mistrust
Incarceration/probation	Rise in self-help mechanisms for security
Lost economic investment in community	Increase in possession/circulation of firearms

Sources: WHO, *The Economic Dimensions of Interpersonal Violence*, 2004; Small Arms Survey 2008, Chapter 7.

Responding to non-conflict armed violence can drain available government resources away from development-oriented activities. On average, expenditures on law enforcement activities consume 10-15 percent of GDP in developing countries, which is significantly higher than the estimated 5 percent of GDP in developed countries.⁴¹ When a government is forced to respond to armed violence this often leads to a shift of available, and often limited, resources toward security initiatives, including policing, incarceration, and court hearings, and away from education, health, and infrastructure programmes. This can hinder progress made on reducing illiteracy rates, reducing maternal mortality rates and child malnutrition, and providing widespread health care; all important aspects of the Millennium Development Goals.

5 Responses to Armed Violence

Armed violence prevention and reduction programming can be described as efforts to contribute to a concrete and visible decline in real and perceived armed violence to enhance the prospects of sustainable human and economic development. There are a bewildering array of interventions that can effectively address the risks and symptoms of armed violence – ranging from enforcement to voluntary measures. A genuinely comprehensive approach to prevention and reduction would seek to simultaneously address the instruments, actors and institutions giving rise to armed violence in the first place. For example, specific initiatives can directly target the instruments of armed violence through weapons collection programmes, bilateral border control operations, improvements to customs capacities to detect and deter arms smugglings, strengthening of police intelligence, forensics and tracking capacities, reforms to firearm legislation, targeted community policing, improving export and import controls of firearms and the strengthening of stockpile management and surplus destruction.

Armed violence prevention and reduction programmes also focus on the factors contributing to armed violence and the structural conditions that give rise to it by, for example, promoting employment schemes for at risk youth, providing education alternatives for vulnerable young men and single female-headed households, enhancing local and responsive governance, redressing sharp horizontal inequalities, eliminating discriminatory policies and practices leading to violent resistance, increasing access to basic

40 IRIN, 'Security concerns stop coffee growers from harvesting,' 21 April 2008.

41 See Inter-American Bank, *Technical Note 5*, 2006, p. 2.

needs in armed violence-prone areas (e.g. water, electricity, safe housing), and providing accountable and proactive security services.

A number of armed violence prevention and reduction programmes exist at the national and local level across Asia. While some states have responded to armed violence with strong-arm tactics, and continue to do so, there is mounting evidence that these practices are not achieving the goal of reducing armed violence, and that alternative approaches are necessary. Although law and order measures will continue to be necessary in some cases to respond to and deter armed violence, alternative approaches targeted at preventing armed violence provide an important avenue for achieving results.

Successful armed violence prevention and reduction requires reliable and sustainable information and evidence to guide the process. A number of Asian governments are investing in developing comprehensive surveillance and monitoring capacities to track the risk factors and effects of armed violence. For example, the Cambodian and Thai governments are investing in developing surveillance systems to monitor national and municipal patterns and trends.

Another crucial component of effective armed violence prevention and reduction is the design of public-private plans and executive committees to coordinate and monitor interventions. Throughout Asia, for example, governments and civil society are together fashioning inclusive and inter-departmental national plans to prevent intentional injuries and promote survivor assistance. For example, the government of Papua New Guinea is formulating a nation building and violence reduction strategy that draws explicitly from survey-based research on armed violence in both rural and urban areas of the country. Likewise, national ministries of health and public health schools are collaborating on research projects (sometimes with support from the World Health Organisation) to identify risk factors for armed violence onset, and interventions to moderate these risks. Additional approaches include investment in 'violence sensitive' urban planning, the promotion of 'safer cities' through enhanced environmental design, the better management of sprawling shantytowns on the perimeter of cities and other innovative interventions.

As in other parts of the world, the most effective armed violence prevention and reduction activities in Asia take place at the sub-national – the municipal and local – level. There are a wide array of civil society actors – including NGOs and community-based associations – involved in a wide range of activities to promote armed violence reduction, including interventions aimed at empowering women as a response to domestic abuse. Advocacy groups frequently promote awareness and sensitisation programmes to assist communities in understanding the risks presented by unregulated small arms and the wide reaching effects of armed violence.

Asian governments would do well to promote enhanced information exchange and cooperation across borders on what works and what does not. International exchanges between organisations in developed and developing countries have served as a constructive forum for the sharing of lessons learned that can be used to develop programming in developing countries. Activities also include the training of health workers to be able to identify victims of armed violence and domestic violence and to provide counselling and legal aid for victims. The documentation of trends in armed violence – including human rights violations – aids in providing information to policy makers and raising awareness about how such violence can be averted.

Local-level interventions frequently highlight the dividends of 'avoiding' and 'managing' conflict before it flares-up into wholesale armed violence. To support these efforts, a number of conflict management and resolution initiatives as well as post-conflict reconstruction programmes have been launched across Asia. Conflict management efforts have included the international mediation of disputes and long-term engagement in peace negotiations, as in Sri Lanka and the Philippines. United Nations peacekeeping missions, as in Cambodia and Timor-Leste, appear to have contributed to stability and post-conflict reconstruction, including a decrease in armed violence. Numerous relief agencies have also supported the provision of humanitarian assistance to war-affected populations, including in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and other countries over the past decade.

Post-conflict reconstruction programming entails both direct armed violence reduction interventions as well as broader development programmes aimed at reducing the factors that contribute to armed violence. Programmes addressing specific post-conflict armed violence concerns include the DDR of combatants in Aceh, the Philippines, and Afghanistan; mine awareness and clearing programmes in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka; and community arms collection programmes in Cambodia and weapons-free villages in the Solomon Islands. Broader development initiatives include promoting democracy and good governance,

reducing poverty, improving the rule of law, and peace-building. These development programmes have the potential to reduce armed violence if they address critical risk factors and at-risk groups, and if they integrate a conflict-sensitive lens enabling conflict prevention.

While the primary responsibility for reducing armed violence lies with national governments, not all governments are equally placed to respond effectively. A number of international organizations have assisted national governments in taking on this challenge. Agencies involved in designing and implementing research, surveillance systems, and armed violence reduction strategies include: various UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNODC), national ministries of health, international and national non-governmental organizations, and donors. For example, UNDP supports Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme, which entails three activities: a comprehensive DDR programme for the Afghan military, the disbandment of illegal armed groups, and the destruction of mines and ammunition stockpiles. The Asian Development Bank is conducting research on urban violence with the aim of identifying different types of violence and the common risk factors, and increasing awareness of the link between urban violence, poverty, and ineffective governance.

Although numerous armed violence prevention programmes exist, or have been implemented, across the Asia-Pacific region, few of these programmes have been systematically appraised to determine their effectiveness in preventing and reducing armed violence. The lack of rigorous evaluations of interventions makes it difficult to provide a list of 'best practices' in armed violence reduction.

6 Conclusion

The persistence of several low-intensity armed conflicts, the threat of Islamic extremism and terrorist acts, the high levels of homicide in some countries, and the frequent reporting of violence against women present considerable challenges to many Asian governments. In some cases, Asian governments possess the capacity and resources to respond to the problem of armed violence. In other cases, governments will require external assistance to respond to armed violence in a targeted fashion that prevents future armed violence from occurring.

An important element of an effective response is the availability of reliable data about armed violence. Currently, information remains limited. Efforts to enhance data collection to produce consistent reporting on armed violence events will result in a better understanding of the reasons for armed violence and the risk factors that contribute to the escalating threat of armed violence. This information will provide the basis for creating sustainable, targeted, and effective armed violence prevention interventions that can reduce the likelihood of armed violence and mitigate its negative effects.

7 Suggested Readings

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