

**Making New International Norms:  
The Small Arms Case**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Denise Garcia is a joint fellow with the International Security Program and World Peace Foundation at BCSIA. She completed her Ph.D. work at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, where she was also a teaching assistant. Her main research interests are normative change, disarmament, and the role of norms and principled ideas in international relations theory and practice. Garcia has extensively applied her research interest for analyzing the rise of the issues of small arms, light weapons and landmines in the international agenda. She held positions at the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces and the Peace Building and Disarmament Program in Geneva. She keeps close academic ties with her home country, Brazil, through active participation in research activities throughout Latin America.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a significant puzzle in international security today: why did small arms control become prominent on the international agenda during the 1990s? And why did the international community attempt to regulate these weapons? This paper illustrates the emergence of small arms and light weapons on the international agenda and draws some parallels with the land mines case.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I outline how norm building processes is a fruitful research guide to examine these pressing questions of land mines and small arms proliferation management. The creation of international norms and the setting of widely agreed upon standards to control small arms and light weapons is central to the multilateral coordination of international responses to tackle the problems associated with their proliferation.

Millions of people worldwide live every day under the fear and threat of armed violence. There are few places left in the world where people can live unhindered by the dangers posed by armed violence. In conflict zones or in violent urban contexts, more than a half million people die every year, victims of gun violence; moreover, it is likely that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 new land mines casualties each year.<sup>2</sup> While nuclear weapons were used once, small arms and light weapons are used everyday, everywhere, contributing to international insecurity.

The first international conference to address the illicit arms trafficking convened in July 2001

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<sup>1</sup> According to the First Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms of 1997, part of the United Nations Resolution A/52/298, August 27, 1997, pursuant to paragraph 1 of General Assembly Resolution 50/70 B of December 12, 1995, small arms are: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns; and light weapons are defined as: heavy machine-guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns and recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, mortars of caliber of less than a 100 mm. Ammunition and explosives: cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons, anti-personnel and anti-tank grenades, land mines.

<sup>2</sup> This represents a significant reduction in the estimate of 26,000 casualties each year since after the Land Mines Ban Treaty, the Ottawa Convention. "The Landmine Monitor Report 2003: Toward a Mine-Free World," [www.icbl.org](http://www.icbl.org).

under the auspices of the United Nations: Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, New York, 9-20 July 2001 (hereafter: UN 2001).<sup>3</sup> This was an indication that the small arms question was a prominent topic on the international agenda.

In the realm of “high politics,” another question that became a concern to the international community was the problems associated with land mines use. Issues considered from the “high politics” domain are those related to how states prepare to wage war. The rise of small arms and land mines control, both subjects from the sphere of high politics of states, in the agenda of the international community, may prove that states security policymaking is no longer only restricted to the closed domain of states. However, governments’ security policies are increasingly influenced by other actors in the international relations, such as nongovernmental actors. There is clearly a growing interest from civil society, and from some states, to oversee and influence governmental activity in domains that before were perceived to be restricted jurisdictions of the state.<sup>4</sup>

The management of the problems associated with small arms proliferation and land mines use can be studied from a norm building framework. First, even though both small arms and land mines became a subject for increasing attention and regulation by the end of the 1990s, they have different natures. Land mines lent themselves to one single norm: their outright ban to halt the humanitarian devastation under one single international treaty.<sup>5</sup> In another way, small arms and light weapons are legitimate tools for individual and state defense needs and raise a more

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<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, New York, July 9-20, 2001. A/CONF. 192/15, contains the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, A/CONF. 192/L.5/Rev.1. The Program of Action is a politically binding document issued by the conference.

<sup>4</sup> For this account and for the most authoritative scholarly explanation of the emergence of land mines as a topic of concern to states and other actors, see Richard Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Landmines,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Summer 1998), p. 613-644.

<sup>5</sup> Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Land mines and on their Destruction, December 1997.

complex management framework. Therefore, the illicit and licit trade on small arms will not be regulated under one norm, but several norms such as transparency and accountability in arms transfers, surplus weapons destruction, regulation of illicit arms brokering, civilian gun possession, and barring the sale of weapons to nonstate actors. Second, a decade ago, there were no concerted efforts to set standards regulating the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of neither small arms and light weapons nor land mines. During the Cold War, the international community focused on the creation of mechanisms of regulation and regimes to control weapons of mass destruction. A regulatory framework of control and disarmament is largely absent vis-à-vis conventional weapons in general, and small arms in particular. Hence, international relations scholars concerned with norms and the role of principled ideas in changing states' interests should gain an understanding of how norms and standards related to small arms become salient. In this process, it is essential to look at which actors are responsible for the diffusion of new normative standards related to small arms.<sup>6</sup> Third, small arms control is essentially an international problem due to the international nature of the illicit arms trafficking and of the licit trade and because of the widespread character of the problem of gun violence in the world. Given these characteristics, small arms control lends itself to an international normative management framework of multiple norms to set widely agreed sets of behavior in areas as distinct as: laws regulating gun possession or international standards for arms transfers and export controls. This last norm requires states to agree upon sets of rules of conduct to determine if the arms recipient will not violate human rights, for instance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent account of the role of nonstate actors in teaching processes, see Martha Finnemore, "International Organizations as Teachers of Norms: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and Science Policy," *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Autumn 1993), pp. 565-597.

<sup>7</sup> The European Parliament approved the European Code of Conduct on January 15, 1998. See Resolution on a European Code of Conduct on the Export of Arms, The European Parliament, 15 January 1998, B4-0033, 0058, 0064, 0081, 0086, and 0104/98 to prevent the flow of arms from European Union countries to unstable regions of

In the first section of this paper, I will explain how the problems caused by small arms proliferation assumed chief importance in the international agenda becoming an issue of multilateral prominence by the end of the 1990s. I analyze how normative change took place from a complete lack of scholarly analysis and policymaking on small arms control to a gradual process of generation of knowledge in the beginning of the 1990s—that preceded norm building—up to the formation of an small arms multilateral framework of action within the United Nations as well as within the non-governmental realm. In the second part, this paper will outline how the management of the problems caused by small arms proliferation and land mines use can be analyzed from a norm building framework.<sup>8</sup> In this analysis, I focus particularly in the norm entrepreneurial role of key individuals, and I also examine the role of groups of individuals, epistemic communities, to highlight how norm building processes are inextricably intertwined with the individuals who are engaged in fostering normative change.

## **SMALL ARMS CONTROL ON THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA**

Awareness-raising regarding the problems caused by small arms and light weapons proliferation on the international agenda happened in two parallel processes during the 1990s: one was a ‘knowledge-generation process’ and the other was an ‘acknowledgement of the problem’ process that took place within the United Nations General Assembly. The first process, which carries the impetus for the emergence of the small arms issue was triggered by scholars

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the world. This decision was made after approximately eight years of pressure from several non-governmental organizations for the adoption of a responsible arms trade policy by the European Union Member-States.

<sup>8</sup> The literature used here focuses on a constructivist branch of international relations.

and arms control practitioners, here called, ‘the arms trade epistemic community’.<sup>9</sup> The first articles that were published concerning the issue of small arms appeared in 1988. These scholars and practitioners were in a privileged position to perceive that changes in the arms trade patterns were affecting the types of weapons that were being mostly used in conflict and violence around the world. As they were researching for years on weapons of mass destruction trade and control, and saw the evolution of arms control practices for decades of bipolar confrontation, they could understand that there were three main patterns happening in confluence:

- change in perceptions of state security;
- a shift of attention from weapons of mass destruction control to conventional weapons;
- a change in the types of conflicts and wars being waged in the aftermath of the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

The second process happened within the United Nations General Assembly, through a series of key Resolutions that reflected the states’ concerns with the ‘illicit’ trafficking of arms. A resolution proposed by Colombia triggered this process in 1988. These two processes in conjunction, within the broad framework of the three patterns described above, opened the way for small arms to become a subject of prominence in the international agenda in the 1990s.

The arms trade epistemic community was instrumental in launching the initial impetus and in highlighting the contours of small arms control as a new aspect of the arms trade and arms control emerging in the post-Cold War. Some individuals were key in advancing and influencing

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of “epistemic communities” was coined by Haas, and will be developed further in this paper. See, Peter Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 1-35.

<sup>10</sup> Author’s interview with Michael Klare, Amherst, MA, United States, December 2003. See Michael Klare, “Light Weapons Diffusion and Global Violence in the Post Cold War Era” in Jasjit Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security* (Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, British American Security Information Council, Indian Pugwash Society, and Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, December 1995).

norm-building in many arenas; initially, within the epistemic community, the key figure was Michael Klare.<sup>11</sup> He was the pioneer on thinking and advising his peers on the dramatic need to focus on creating a small arms control framework. There were other individuals who played central role in norm building, such as Edward Lurance.<sup>12</sup> Without such prominent individuals who acted as norm entrepreneurs, ultimately engaging in information dissemination, campaigning and advocacy, the process would perhaps have remained circumscribed in scholarly articles. The ‘acknowledgement process’ within the United Nations started slowly especially during the late 1980s. However, the creation of the United Nations Panel of Experts on Small Arms, in 1995 followed by the decision to convene an international conference on illicit trafficking, the UN 2001, catalyzed the state-led side of norm development.<sup>13</sup>

## **KNOWLEDGE BEFORE NORM BUILDING**

The creation of “expert” knowledge is a necessary condition for collective action to emerge.<sup>14</sup> The generation and dissemination of knowledge preceded norm building on both small arms and land mines cases. There were defining moments that contributed to the rise of the small arms issue into the international agenda. However, the initial impetus can be traced back to some studies, published from 1993-1995, that noted and helped to frame this totally new issue. There

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<sup>11</sup> Michael T. Klare is the Five College Professor of Peace and World Security Studies (a joint appointment at Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, United States), and Director of the Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies (PAWSS), a position he has held since 1985.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Lurance is Professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) and director of the Small Arms and director of the Program on Security and Development. He is co-founder of the International Action Network on Small Arms.

<sup>13</sup> Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms of 1997, part of the United Nations Resolution A/52/298, August 27 1997, pursuant to paragraph 1 of General Assembly Resolution 50/70 B of December 12, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Krause, “The Challenge of Small Arms and Light Weapons” Paper presented at the Conference of the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, May 1998.



was a lack of knowledge regarding the problems connected to the spread and proliferation of small arms that these studies helped to fill in. These articles sprang from the arms trade epistemic community and from the field researchers individually concerned with small arms proliferation.<sup>15</sup> These studies suggested and advised on policymaking on more accountable and transparent small arms transfers. The most important to note is that these articles started drawing attention to a new issue as well as the outlining of its main characteristics. The literature on norms underscores the key role of norm entrepreneurialship in advancing pressing questions on the international agenda as well as raising awareness to problems of a global nature. Arms control scholars and practitioners played an important role in interpreting and framing small arms as a new issue and helping to place it as a new topic to the international community.

Among the first articles to be published by the arms trade epistemic community, Aaron Karp's study on "Arming Ethnic Conflict", appeared in *Arms Control Today*, in September 1993, argued that the most destabilizing feature of the arms trade after the Cold War was the uncontrolled transfer of small arms and light weapons to sub-state groups.<sup>16</sup> Karp refers to 'small and light arms' that are the weapons of choice in ethnic conflict. These arms, not accounted by any regional and international control instrument, at that time, should receive urgent attention from the arms trade community. This author recommends small and light arms to be added to the agenda of international arms transfers regimes and registers.

Along the same lines, Tara Kartha, in "Spread of Arms and Instability" investigated the reasons for the destabilization in Pakistani society that could be found in the massive

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<sup>15</sup> For another account of the evolution of the small arms question, see, Edward Laurence, "The History of the Global Efforts to Regulate Small Arms, paper presented at the Social Science Research Council's Workshop on International Law and Small Arms Proliferation, February 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron Karp, "Arming Ethnic Conflict," *Arms Control Today*, September 1993, p. 8-23.

accumulation of small arms.<sup>17</sup> This latter was responsible for the exacerbation of violence in that region. The author recommends that the government addresses the causes behind the pursuit for weapons acquisitions. Along the same lines, Christopher Smith in “Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Pakistan and Northern India” denounces the destabilizing effects the American arms pipeline furnished to the Afghani war, had in the region after the end of the Cold War, tracing the sources of supply and demand of small arms in that region.<sup>18</sup> He is in close company with Kartha, when affirming that abundant weapons presence was responsible for exacerbating the violence in the region and in hampering the state-building processes. That is also the case, when Smith recommends that the root causes for the recourse of weapons should be addressed. What is more, the author recommends that controls on ammunition should be put in place.

In the subsequent year, there were some relevant scholarly studies that appeared. Prashant Dikshit published “Proliferation of Small Arms and Minor Weapons”; in this study, he already warns of the existence of gun-runners responsible for fuelling the trade in small arms to conflicting regions of the world.<sup>19</sup> In addition, this author alerts for the problems associated with weapons transfers to nonstate groups. He recommends the crafting of two sets of policy proposals: one related to the (national) implementation by each country, of stringent gun possession laws, and the other is: to seek for an unanimous international ban on arms supply to nonstate actors. In the fall of 1994, a study appeared in *Foreign Affairs* by Stephen Goose and Frank Smyth, “Arming Genocide in Rwanda” dealing with how exacerbated ethnic tensions were

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<sup>17</sup> Tara Kartha, “Spread of Arms and Instability,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XVI, No. 18 (November 1993) pp. 1033-1050.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Smith, “Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Pakistan and Northern India,” *Defense Studies*, No. 20 (September 1993) pp. 48-70.

<sup>19</sup> Prashant Dikshit, “Proliferation of Small Arms and Minor Weapons,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 17, No.2 (May 1994) pp. 187-204.

by the sheer presence of weapons.<sup>20</sup> They demonstrate that as it was seen in Rwanda, the unaccounted small arms trade helped fuelling the genocide. Despite the urgent importance of this issue, it was still understudied. These authors recommend the expansion of the United Nations Conventional Arms Register to include small arms and light weapons.

Aaron Karp publishes in 1994, “The Arms Revolution: the Major Impact of Small Arms”.<sup>21</sup> He criticizes the literature on the arms trade for falling short of perceiving the drastic changes in the international patterns of the arms trade that took place after the Cold War. The weapons that have assumed center-stage were small arms and light weapons and constitute a big threat to international stability. This author recommends a series of policy measures: a clear-cut definition of small arms; enforcement of export controls; harmonization of arms transfers; extension of the United Nations Conventional Arms Register to include small arms, and strengthen national legislation to curb arms illicit trafficking.

Michael Klare uncovers in “Awash in Armaments: Implications of the Trade in Light Weapons”, four channels of supply of small arms: government-to-government, commercial sales, covert deliveries by governments, black market arms deals.<sup>22</sup> This article reinforces what was discussed in the first part of this paper, after the end of the Cold War, there was a shift in arms trade patterns with severe implications for proliferation of arms in regions of ethnic conflict. This author recommends stricter national and international control on arms transfers to countries under United Nations embargoes.

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen D. Goose and Frank Smyth, “Arming Genocide in Rwanda,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No.5 (September/October 1994) pp. 86-96.

<sup>21</sup> Aaron Karp, “The Arms Revolution: the Major Impact of Small Arms”, Vol. 17, No.4, *The Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 1994), pp. 65-77.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Klare, “Awash in Armaments: Implications of the Trade in Light Weapons,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 1994-95), pp. 24-26, 75-76.

Greg Mills publishes in Spring 1994, at the African Defence Review: “Small Arms Control: Some Early Thoughts”, offers an interesting account of how Africa is the target region for starting small arms control.<sup>23</sup> This is because this region lends itself very much for arms proliferation due to several reasons such as increased use of private security and military firms, unsafe arsenal storage, among others. Even though he acknowledges that arms are not the cause of violence, their presence may aggravate delicate political situations. This author recommends five policy proposals: stricter controls on arms possession, safer weapons storage, microdisarmament and demobilization efforts, creation of regional disarmament agreements. Finally, Christopher Smith published “Light Weapons - The Forgotten Dimension of the Arms Trade” (published at *Brassey’s Defence Yearbook*, 1994) where he stresses the need for a new arms control paradigm where the anarchic element of small arms control gets curtailed. Smith points out to another fruitful area in reducing arms proliferation which is the control of ammunition.

In February 1994, there was a meeting of the arms trade epistemic community. “Epistemic communities” are channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country”.<sup>24</sup> Michael Klare called this meeting and most scholars researching on the arms trade were present.<sup>25</sup> This was a seminal meeting to bring about a new understanding of the changed post-Cold War arms trade and arms control paradigm. Therefore, research and action should recognize the following new characteristics:

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory Mills, “Small Arms Control: Some Early Thoughts,” *African Defence Review*, Vol. 15 (March 1994), pp. 42-54.

<sup>24</sup> Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities,” p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Author’s interview with Edward Laurence, Geneva, Fall 2002, and with Michael Klare. A book was published as a result of this meeting, *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons*, that was essential to start disseminating knowledge about the small arms subject.

- from a handful of arms suppliers existent during the Cold War, there were many more actors that could play a role of arms suppliers in the Cold War aftermath;
- not only governments are arms suppliers, but increasingly, arms brokers and fixers who usually operate on the fringes of the laws;
- changed matrix of conflicts - from international type of disputes to civil and ethnic types of unrest;
- mechanisms must address small arms that are being massively used in such conflicts;
- halt governmental arms transfers to nonstate groups;
- the normative framework in place to address weapons of mass destruction is not adaptable to address the control of small arms.

The February 1994 meeting worked as a source of research innovation as a channel through which the diffusion of innovation of policy action started emerging.<sup>26</sup> In addition, it was the starting point for the development of shared judgments on how to deal collectively with the specific problems caused by the availability and proliferation of small arms. The members of the arms trade epistemic community patterns of reasoning, policy project drawing on shared values, causal beliefs, the use of shared discursive practices, shared commitment to the application and production of knowledge, in their work with the arms trade, especially during the Cold War. Therefore, the members of an epistemic community distinguish themselves from other influence-seeking groups (like NGOs) because of the essence binding them together: the common motivations that drive its members to seek political influence originate outside the political sphere; i.e. in their shared professional or academic socialization. The arms trade community of experts was said to be the first to contemplate that there were new sets of problems to be

addressed by the arms trade community.<sup>27</sup> The arms trade epistemic community was instrumental in the examination of the factors underpinning the new way of researching on the post-Cold War arms trade underscoring a revolution that has hit the arms trade in the aftermath of the Cold War. For instance, the analyses of the modern arms black market structure and operation, empirical studies on post-conflict regions of the world, and the creation of policy measures to control small arms.

The role of this epistemic community was crucial for initiating the global awareness vis-à-vis small arms proliferation processes, and also to start raising international awareness regarding the unlawfulness of indiscriminate arms proliferation.<sup>28</sup> The non governmental organization (NGO) activist side of small arms norm building took relatively long to flourish.<sup>29</sup> Differently, from land mines norm building processes where the NGOs assumed great important as leaders in the normative change processes from the start, small arms was first a scholarly led subject, than state-led and NGOs followed the states. Therefore, by 1994, the small arms issue was only about academics, arms trade researchers who were writing and documenting the need for new research and this area and practitioners in the conflict regions of the world who were writing about the harmful consequences of small arms proliferation. The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) played an important role in knowledge generation with the series of books on the United Nations led management of weapons and arms related dimensions of peacekeeping in post conflict, such as in Somalia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Former Yugoslav Republic, Cambodia, Liberia, Nicaragua and El Salvador.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For the understanding of the ‘epistemic community’ concept, see Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities”.

<sup>27</sup> Author’s interview with Edward Laurence.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ilkka Tiihonen, Virginia Gamba, et al., *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Training* (United Nations publication), 1998; Paulo Wrobel, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Nicaragua and El Salvador* (United Nations publication), 1996;

In 1995, there were 20 publications on small arms questions, differently from 1993 when just a few articles were published. This shows how increasingly conscious the epistemic community was of the small arms control problems. Among these 20 publications, there were two very important studies that appeared: the first two books on small arms. They gathered several researchers from the epistemic community of the arms trade. First was *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons*, in January, 1995.<sup>31</sup> This collection of essays surveys the state of small arms by that time and was the result of the first meeting of the epistemic community of the arms trade. Not only were the members of the epistemic community there but also government officials, and representatives of human rights and other non-governmental organizations. This meeting highlighted the gaps in the knowledge on the trade in small arms; little scholarly attention was paid to the trade in light weapons in comparison to research on the global trade in major weapons systems and weapons of mass destruction. Light weapons have historically been assumed to follow the same trade patterns as major conventional weapons. Yet this assumption has proved to be increasingly erroneous in the post-Cold War era, as small arms trafficking has augmented despite a depressed market for major weapons systems.

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Marcos Mendiburu and Sarah Meek, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Haiti* (United Nations publication), 1996; Estanislao Angel Zawels, Stephen John Stedman, et al., *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: The Issues* (United Nations Publication) 1996; Clement Adibe, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Liberia* (United Nations publication), 1996; Andrei Raevsky, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Aspects of Psychological Operations and Intelligence* (United Nations publication), 1996; Eric Berman, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Mozambique* (United Nations publication), 1996; Christopher Smith, Peter Batchelor, and Jakkie Potgieter, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Small Arms Management and Peacekeeping in Southern Africa*, (United Nations publication), 1996; Jianwei Wang, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Cambodia* (United Nations publication), 1996; Barbara Ekwall-Uebelhart and Andrei Raevsky, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Croatia and Bosnia, Herzegovina* (United Nations publication), 1996; Jeremy Ginifer, *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Rhodesia/Zimbabwe* (United Nations publication), 1995; Clement Adibe *Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project - Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Somalia* (United Nations publication), 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Boutwell, Michael Klare and Laura Reed, eds. *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons*, a collection of essays from a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995.

A point of consensus of this book's authors is the pressing need for research on the relationship between light weapons trafficking and the proliferation of ethnic, sectarian, and civil conflicts. In addition, there was a shared concern that governmental and multilateral disarmament initiatives must address small arms and light weapons.

Almost a year later, the second book on the small arms issue was published in December 1995, *Light Weapons and International Security*.<sup>32</sup> This book written by the arms trade epistemic community built on knowledge generated by the previously mentioned studies and served to illustrate the still resilient gaps on small arms control research. Studies in this book, especially the piece by Michael Klare, highlight that most of the recent thinking on controlling the arms trade had been guided by the Proliferation/Arms Race model.<sup>33</sup> According to this model, arms and technology transfers are dictated by a few major suppliers and a large number of Third World recipients. With the end of the bipolar confrontation, this model has lost its utility and therefore, a new paradigm that better describes the realities of the post-Cold War is needed. Therefore, Klare develops a new model on Diffusion/Global Violence proliferation. This model depicts the post-Cold War arms trade characteristics where the 'diffusion' of arms happens not only among governments but also to private armies and militias, insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and nonstate actors. In addition, this pattern of arms diffusion coincides with the fragmentation of societies along ethnic, religious, tribal and linguistic lines. This new small arms proliferation post-Cold War model suggested researchers to investigate two main areas: first, on the process of diffusion itself; i.e. how arms enter and proliferate in societies, and second, on the relationship between light weapons and the propensity for armed violence. The

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<sup>32</sup> Jasjit Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security* (Published by Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, British American Security Information Council, Indian Pugwash Society, and Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (December 1995).



first area requires a systematic effort to locate the principal sources of light weapons and to find out arms routes; the second area requires empirical studies on the impact of light weapons diffusion on particular states and societies.

By 1996, when the first UN Small Arms Panel was set up, four of these scholars, newly converted to the small arms question, testified to the United Nation Panel of Governmental Experts: Michael Klare and Edward Laurence were among those. At the time the Panel was set, there was a demand that no NGO could testify, only these experts and this testifies to the importance of the role of these scholars in spurring the beginning of normative change<sup>34</sup>. The norm building processes starts to catalyze within the United Nations.

### **NORM-BUILDING WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS**

In 1988, Colombia introduced resolution 43/75 I of 7 December 1988, the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly on arms transfers and illicit arms trafficking. This Resolution was the first to request the Secretary-General to carry out, with the assistance of governmental experts, a study on ways and means of promoting transparency in international transfers of conventional arms including that on the problem of illicit arms trade. Colombia has also introduced resolution 46/36 H, adopted by the General Assembly on 6 December 1991, as a result of which the United Nations Disarmament Commission issued guidelines for the implementation of concrete measures aimed at preventing arms from reaching those who intend to use them to destabilize governments, foment violence and terrorism and promote trafficking in narcotic drugs, ordinary and organized crime, mercenarism and other criminal activities.

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<sup>33</sup> Klare, Michael, "Light Weapons Diffusion and Global Violence in the Post Cold War Era" in Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security*.

Since the adoption of resolution 46/36 H in 1991, many countries started focusing on illicit arms trafficking. The former President of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré, asked the United Nations Secretary General to send a mission to Mali, in 1994, to help resolve the unstable situation exacerbated by the large presence of weapons. From that moment on, a growing international awareness formed and the necessity of creating practical and legislative measures to curb the anarchical situation of proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in West Africa was recognized. In resolution 49/75 G of 15 December 1994, introduced by Mali on behalf of a group of African States, In resolution 49/75 M of the same date, introduced by Afghanistan and jointly sponsored by other countries, including Colombia, the Assembly stresses the need for effective national control measures in order to prevent illicit transfers, as an important contribution to the relaxation of tension and peaceful reconciliation processes. Countries hard-hit by the negative consequences associated with the illicit trafficking, like Colombia and Afghanistan are at the forefront in proposing resolutions. Another impetus to attract attention to the western Africa situation followed; in a symbolic gesture now known as the “Timbuktu Flame of Peace”, approximately 3,000 arms were burned in Mali in March 1996.<sup>35</sup>

The international community gradually realized the magnitude of the problems caused by the unrestricted availability of small arms.<sup>36</sup> The ‘Supplement of an Agenda for Peace’ was an instrumental document to give impetus to the small arms control norm-building process.<sup>37</sup> It was the first international document to call for urgent measures to tackle “*light weapons that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands*”. The Supplement of an Agenda for Peace triggered a flurry of activities in the international and regional level. The years from 1995 up to

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<sup>34</sup> Author’s interview with Edward Laurence and Michael Klare.

<sup>35</sup> Robin-Edward Poulton and Ibrahim Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu - Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (1998), p. 366.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 30.

the end of 1999 were essential for the norm building process. For instance, the creation of the United Nations Panel of Experts on Small Arms, in 1995; the publication of its first report in 1997, followed by the decision to convene an international conference on illicit trafficking catalyzed the state-led side of norm development.<sup>38</sup> The 1997 Report worked as a cornerstone in profiling the array of problems associated with small arms proliferation. In addition, it defined what would be weapons to be called ‘small arms and light weapons’. The second and third Panel Reports, started acting as well as norm-setters as they proposed concrete set of norms in many aspects of the problem, advancing policy proposals on key aspects prior to the UN 2001, such as advancing measures to control illicit arms brokering activities, destroying ceased and surplus weapons, harmonization of national laws regarding border controls, and the creation of a norm of marking new weapons to enable proper record-keeping and tracing.

## **THE NORMS LITERATURE: AN APPROACH TO ANALYZING SMALL ARMS**

The aftermath of the Cold War has proved to be a fruitful moment for the analysis of the role of norms in world affairs. Many empirical and theoretical studies have appeared rendering the interpretation of phenomena in the light of norms and ideas, a fertile ground for thinking the relations among states.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, there was still a relative optimism vis-à-vis the power of multilateralism and the intensification of transnational advocacy networks concerning many subjects. Since mid-1990s, many regional and international documents were agreed to set standards and norms to deal with the problems caused by small arms proliferation. On an

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<sup>37</sup> Supplement to An Agenda for Peace, A/50/60, S/1995/1, paragraph 60, January 3, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms of 1997, part of the United Nations Resolution A/52/298, August 27 1997, pursuant to paragraph 1 of General Assembly Resolution 50/70 B of December 12, 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Basically all studies examined here on the norms literature is representative of this trend.

international level, however, there is no broad-scope international legally binding agreement regulating the wide range of issues associated with this class of weapons. The Firearms Protocol is the only international legally binding document not yet into force addressing small arms; however, its narrow scope includes only commercially traded weapons, not including illicit arms trafficking.<sup>40</sup> In July 2001, the UN 2001 issued a politically binding Plan of Action that set up the first internationally agreed set of norms and standards concerning small arms.

Broadly speaking, the literature on norms in international relations might be divided into two sorts of analyses: the ones that treat norms as *post hoc* rationalizations of self interest and another which looks at *ex ante* sources of action, separate from interests.<sup>41</sup> The small arms and land mines norm-building process fall on the second sort. The return to systematically analyzing norms as *ex-ante* sources of action is identified in the literature with enquiries such as: (1) how do norms make a difference in politics? (2) where do norms come from? (3) How do they change politics? (4) and particularly, how do norms play a role in political change?

The norms literature looks at three stages of norm evolution. This is helpful in the understanding of how small arms and land mines became so prominent, given they were issues previously out of the arms control realm and also out of reach of influence of nonstate actors. The stages are when norms arise, when norms start to become known and accepted, and what happens when norms are adopted and internalized. Some studies fall into the category of an evolutionary or genealogical approach to norms as new ideas that are primarily promoted by

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<sup>40</sup> United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. "Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Part and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime," (Vienna, Austria: 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Gregory A. Raymond, "Problems and Prospects in the Study of International Norms," *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41 (1997), pp. 205-245.

norm entrepreneurs who are driven by principled ideas or self-interest.<sup>42</sup> This first stage of norm creation might be also associated with the prominence and influence of the norm's supporter. In the case of land mines, this is very clear: Lloyd Axworthy and the International Committee of the Red Cross acted as a prominent and prestigious advocate for this pressing humanitarian cause. But the appeal of principled ideas as promoted by the advocate is not sufficient. For this reason, the second stage is usually described as one where the norm ideally must fit within the previously existing normative setting. Thus, the norm must acquiesce, cohere, and make sense to the environment and norms already in place to be more resilient. The land mines ban can be understood to fit into a previously existing idea of the 'Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects'. Likewise, the small arms control norms cohered with a previously existing framework of control of the United Nations Register of Conventional Weapons. The third stage is usually understood to include behavior such as emulation or imitation of others, and the ensuing change in the discourse and practices of actors.

From a theoretical standpoint, certain authors emphasize one norm formation stage more than another. Some focus on the first stage where norms are diffused through the entrepreneur, and thus the main impetus resides on the individual promoting new ideational change. Norm formation in the small arms case happened in two phases. The first, from the beginning of the 1990s until 1998,<sup>43</sup> marked the establishment of small arms control as one of the most important topics on the agenda of states. The second norm formation phase took place from 1999 to 2001. During these years, international awareness vis-à-vis the problems caused by unrestricted small

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<sup>42</sup> Ann Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40 (1996), pp. 363-89; and Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights."

<sup>43</sup> As demonstrated before, the emergence of the small arms issue took place during the 1990s. The end of this decade marked states' decision to have the first international conference to address illicit arms trafficking.

arms proliferation was consolidated and many standards and norms were proposed, such as set of measures on surplus management, weapons destruction, transparency, regulation of illicit arms brokering activities, and export controls. In the first phase, the role of two main norm entrepreneurs, Michael Klare is decisive to create a new norm: research and action must be focused on a new small arms control paradigm; and Edward Lurance in the need to engage the NGOs in an international networking in coalition-building with pro-control like-minded states. In the land mines norm building process, former Canadian Prime-Minister Lloyd Axworthy prestigious standing in international politics was particular influential as a norm entrepreneur. His influence was catalyzed by the tireless efforts of Jodi Williams, 1997 Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work as the founding coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Land mines (ICBL). ICBL started with six non-government organizations (NGOs) in October 1992 and has grown to over 1,000 NGOs in more than sixty countries. The first stage of norm formation usually comprises large efforts to disseminate information and to set the new agenda.<sup>44</sup> This entails active and manipulative persuasion to fit the new norms into and make then resonate within the already existing system of norms. In both small arms and land mines cases, there was an active information dissemination process. In the former, the information started to be generated by scholars' studies published from 1993 onwards, then enhanced by Reports and studies published by the United Nations. In the latter case, information was generated by NGOs who were central in politicizing land mines accidents as a humanitarian issue.

In both the small arms and land mines cases, there already existed arms control frameworks, such as the United Nations Conventional Arms Register. Upon its establishment,

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<sup>44</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights"; and Raymond, "Problems and Prospects in the Study of International Norms."

the problems caused by small arms started to draw attention of world leaders.<sup>45</sup> There were other factors that occurred to strengthen this trend. The collapsing state of Somalia in 1991, and the widespread situation of lawlessness coupled with substantial arms circulation started threatening the work of the United Nations activities there. Likewise, in Angola in September 1992, the fight between UNITA and MPLA until 1994 left arms in circulation that not only endangered not only the United Nations post-conflict work but also imperiled the life of civilians. In 1994, the Rwandan genocide was perpetrated with arms furnished by circumvention of United Nations embargoes. In Liberia, the path to state collapse started in 1989 with the NPL guerrilla forces led by Charles Taylor, resulting in 2.3 million displaced people in five years. All these conflicts carry two similar patterns: intra-state wars and wars carried out with small arms. In the norm-building literature, some authors talk about coherence with already existing norms whereas others call it resonance. In addition, some of the literature looks at the establishment of networks to generate broad support for normative change within, across, and outside government channels. In both small arms control and land mines ban campaign, the establishment of networks can be observed; in the former, the formation of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) in 1998 and in the latter, the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines (ICBL).<sup>46</sup> These networks, most prominently, the ICBL, constituted powerful avenues of influence and coalition-building of key actors. ICBL was also decisive to the Ottawa Treaty to come into fruition.

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<sup>45</sup> Mitsuro Donowaki, "Addressing Light Weapons and Small Arms Proliferation," in Chalmers, et al., eds., *Developing Arms Transparency: The Future of the United Nations Register* (Redwood, 1997), p. 203.

<sup>46</sup> For an analysis of IANSA as a transnational advocacy network, see Suzette R. Grillot, in "Small Arms, Big Problems: IANSA and the Making of a Transnational Advocacy Network," paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, February 20-24, 2001.

## CONDITIONS FOR NORM DIFFUSION

How do actors involved in small arms control or on the land mines ban get to diffuse the norms they advocate? A lacuna in the study of norms is the absence of hypotheses indicating which norms matter; only few authors suggested some conditions under which norms matter. The first condition is domestic legitimation. States under domestic turmoil or insecure of their international status might feel compelled to adopt a new norm or embrace normative/ideational change.<sup>47</sup> For instance, one may cite the case of Mali in the first half of the 1990s. This was a typically insecure post-conflict country that chose to embrace a profound normative change. After the United Nations visit to Mali, the former President Alpha Oumar Konaré successfully enacted the 1998 Moratorium on Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa. The Moratorium was signed by the sixteen West African States and banned the production, import, and export of arms for three years.<sup>48</sup> The material interests of domestic actors play a significant enabling condition for norm formation and for international norms to integrate into the domestic level.<sup>49</sup>

The second condition is prominence.<sup>50</sup> The acceptance of a norm might spring either from the quality of the norm itself or from the actor promoting it. Therefore, due to qualities of influence and popularity of either the norm promoter or the norm itself, a state might be influenced to embed a norm. In this case, an outstanding example is the International Committee of the Red Cross whose prestige acted in the promotion of efforts to ban land mines. The norm

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<sup>47</sup> Most notably, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 887-917.

<sup>48</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew P. Cortell and James W. Davis, "Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms: A Research Agenda," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics."



promoter's prestige can also generate opposite results: the United Nations opposition to the norms of civilian gun possession regulation and banning the sale of weapons to nonstate actors, in the UN 2001, made them not to be in the Plan of Action. Another enabling condition is related to intrinsic characteristics of the norm.<sup>51</sup> Norms that are more universally encompassing are more likely to be accepted. Nonetheless, other research has shown that norms that are directly connected to prohibiting bodily harm to innocent bystanders are extremely powerful in mobilizing transnational support. This last feature has also been noticed by Price who claimed that perhaps the single most distinguishing feature of the norm banning land mines is that it recognizes the indiscriminate bodily harm land mines cause, even years after a conflict is over. A fourth enabling condition is adjacency claims or path dependence.<sup>52</sup> Activists work to frame their issues in ways that make persuasive connections between existing norms and emergent norms to generate a more conducive environment for acceptance. This phenomenon has also been called 'coherence with already existing norms' or 'construction of cognitive frameworks'.<sup>53</sup> Here it can be perceived that the norm of a 'land mines ban' cohered with previously existing norms on superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering of certain conventional weapons, such as blinding weapons. The efforts to promote a norm of transparency in the production, holdings, and transfers of small arms found a resonating normative background within the international efforts to promote transparency in weapons of mass destruction. These efforts that slowly began during the 1960s became well known in the 1990s, with the establishment of the United Nations Conventional Arms Register. A fifth condition for the diffusion of norms is world time-context.<sup>54</sup> World historic events such as major wars and economic crises might clear the way for the search

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms"; Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights"; and Raymond, "Problems and Prospects in the Study of International Norms."

for new norms and ideas. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was certainly a shock event that spurred international normative change on transparency policies vis-à-vis conventional weapon build-ups and the United Nations Conventional Arms Register is a regime addressing these.

The perception of a crisis or shock can work as a crucial factor in precipitating ideational or normative change. This feature is absent in both cases analyzed here. There was not one single shock event that triggered norm building in land mines and small arms control. Instead, there was a laborious work from nonstate actors, in the land mines case, and of norm entrepreneurs, states, and nonstate actors, in the small arms case, to bring about the politicization of the situation. As Richard Price has noted, in the case of the land mines, civil society and not states were the primary catalysts for identifying and politicizing the situation as a crisis issue on state agendas. Price argues that through issue generation and moral persuasion, transnational civil society sought to redefine the point at which states determine the balance between military and humanitarian considerations.<sup>55</sup>

## **CREATING NORMS: THE ROLE OF STATE AND NONSTATE ACTORS**

### **Norm Entrepreneurs**

The norms literature underscores the centrality of norm entrepreneurs in norm building processes. Finnemore and Sikkink argue that empirical research on transnational norm entrepreneurs found that their persuading means can be indeed sophisticated. They engage in “strategic social construction” where new ideas are firstly promoted by norm entrepreneurs, who might be driven by principled ideas or self-interest. In the absence of a norm entrepreneur, states

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<sup>54</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics.”

<sup>55</sup> Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights,” p. 625.

might well emulate the behavior of other prestigious states that come to adopt the norm. In the case of the small arms issue, the role of some individuals helped not to frame the issue as a topic of concern for states, but also to elevate it in the international agenda. Edward Lurance who addressed the negative consequences of light weapons trafficking in one of the first edited volumes about the issue was the key norm entrepreneurs promoting awareness and action.<sup>56</sup> Lurance has contributed not only on the dissemination of knowledge on small arms, but also on pursuing advocacy efforts together with many NGOs, through the formation of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) in 1998.

The origins of the transnational NGO network to control small arms, IANSA, can be traced back to a meeting that took place on 10 December 1997, day that the ICBL chief campaigner, Jodi Williams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in Washington D.C. The participants of the meeting acknowledged from the inception that there were many different constituencies that have a stake in gun/light weapons proliferation: human rights, refugee/relief work, development, disarmament, domestic gun control, peacekeeping troops, and regional campaign groups, usually related to violence reduction.<sup>57</sup> Many of these constituencies had already identified a self-interested stake in global aspects of the issue, but there were difficulties in conceptualizing an overarching framework for activities to combat the worldwide proliferation of small arms. For instance, on one hand, domestic gun control groups focus generally on the public health implications of gun availability; on the other hand, in developed countries, this

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<sup>56</sup> In Jasjit Singh, *Light Weapons and International Security*.

<sup>57</sup> The NGOs present were: InterAction, WorldVision, Handicap International, Human Rights Watch Arms Project, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, International Committee of the Red Cross, Pax Christi, International Alert, Arias Foundation, Africa Policy Center, BASIC, Federation of American Scientists, Council on Economic Priorities, Saferworld, Center for Defense Information, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence; as Universities: Johns Hopkins University Gun Policy Center, and the Monterey Institute of International Studies. There was also one individual in his private capacity as gun control activist. Sources and information on this part draw upon original “Notes on Small/Light Arms Campaign” meeting, December 10, 1997, Washington D.C. Transmitted to the author in 1998, by the organizers of the Preparatory Committee to IANSA, [www.PreCom.com](http://www.PreCom.com).

issue is connected to suicides, whereas in some developing countries, the issue is about homicides. The general opinion in the meeting was that a single treaty would not suffice to control small arms, and policy initiatives and norm building were necessary in many fronts: international, regional and local. There was also a general extensive discussion on potential overarching themes and subordinate goals of a possible small arms campaign. Edward Laurance, present on the meeting, encouraged an overall humanitarian focus to such a campaign (rather than a crime control or public health focus).

This meeting reached a consensus that a global campaign was necessary. Edward Laurance offered to create a web-oriented campaign through the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, USA. The creation of the web-based “Preparatory Committee” (PrepCom) to IANSA was fundamental to gather more researchers and activists around the issue. The PrepCom served, in addition, as a useful electronic clearing-house for disseminating information. PrepCom opened in January 1998 with 12 NGOS, among those: Human Right Watch, Bonn International Center for Conversion; Saferworld, International Alert, and BASIC, and some concerned individuals around the world. The PrepCom came about mostly due to efforts undertaken by Laurance who began to promote the idea that what had been done with land mines could be undertaken with land mines.<sup>58</sup> Laurance worked in closed collaboration with the Canadian government who were very encouraging of these efforts and had Laurance coming to brief government officials.

A particular important individual at this stage was Lloyd Axworthy. When the signing of the landmine treaty happened and the last day was crowned by NGO day celebration, Laurance was invited by Axworthy to give the last presentation, in which Laurance said that at that point

there was something to be done with small arms. After his presentation, Laurance had a half hour with Axworthy and the deal for the creation of the transnational action network on small arms was struck, on 7 December 1997: Lloyd Axworthy told Laurance in this private meeting, he needed a movement to control small arms and Laurance was supposed to get the critical mass necessary for that. Following this, they met the press when Axworthy confirmed publicly that he would back a global movement against uncontrolled small arms proliferation. In addition, Axworthy was at the forefront of the governmental efforts to launch initiatives to tackle the unchecked small arms proliferation. He was also instrumental in spearheading a governmental coalition of “like-minded” governments led mainly by Canada and Norway.

December 12 1997, three years after the 1994 first meeting of the arms trade epistemic community, the momentum had built to the formation of a global management small arms framework. The first financial sponsors of the network were Canada, followed by: Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria. This coalition of like-minded states was funding what would become IANSA.<sup>59</sup> Laurance’s efforts in persuading governments to contribute were pivotal in engaging the coalition of like-minded states. At this stage where the ink had not yet dried on the land mines treaty, there was another campaign but at this time, on curbing small arms proliferation. The space created at the Internet by PrepCom, and later by IANSA gathered more than a hundred NGOs throughout the world. These organizations were affiliated to many interests: disarmament, arms control, human rights, development, and also, more interestingly, grass roots movements. Many religious leaders mainly from the ecumenical movement also gathered around the efforts launched in the virtual space created by IANSA.

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<sup>58</sup> In a personal interview with the author, Laurance noted that he was criticized by people who were engaged in the land mines campaign as they thought there was competition. Yet, there was an acknowledgement that the problems of small arms were much more complex.

<sup>59</sup> Author’s interview with Edward Laurance.

## Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

In the land mines case, NGOs effectively created networks with governments and intergovernmental organizations.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, NGOs created the framework in which they built their own agenda and connected it to the interstate agenda. The transnational campaign has found key partners in national policymakers. The Belgium Parliament for instance was a key figure in pushing the process inside the country.<sup>61</sup> Among governments, Canada has been at the forefront of this “unconventional diplomacy” that has involved members of civil society in the policymaking and international negotiation process. Using brinkmanship strategy, Lloyd Axworthy proposed the separate track system of negotiation and treaty-making to address the land mines issue that became known as the “Ottawa process.”<sup>62</sup>

Nongovernmental actors are assuming an ever-widening role of in international relations. In addition, virtually all the literature on norms point to the visible impact of the NGO on normative change. Nonetheless, a question remains to be answered: how do NGOs exert influence in world politics?<sup>63</sup> In some issue areas, such as human rights advocacy, the influence of NGOs in policy outcomes is clearly more visible. Moreover, it is very important to note, and especially so for our purposes here, that it is increasingly difficult to find an NGO belonging to just one country; i.e., an NGO that is not multinational and whose influence is felt on one country only. Increasingly, NGOs are transnational or have the effects of their work felt across

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<sup>60</sup> Various UN agencies were involved in the efforts, such as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UN has also played a leading role in demining operations.

<sup>61</sup> Belgium was the first country to ban land mines.

<sup>62</sup> Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights.”

<sup>63</sup> Karp, “Arming Ethnic Conflict”; Keith Krause, “Norm-Building in Security Spaces: The Emergence of the Light Weapons Problematic,” GERSI/REGIS working paper (Quebec, 2001); Ann Marie Clark, “Non-Governmental Organizations and their Influence on International Society,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 56-80; Jackie Smith and Ronald Pagnucco, with George A. Lopez, “Globalizing Human Rights: The Work of Transnational Human Rights NGOs in the 1990s,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 20 (1998) pp. 379-412;

borders. This is especially so in the case of NGOs dealing with small arms and light weapons. This issue has characteristics that transcend one frontier of one country. A typical NGO, in the small arms case, is Viva Rio. This organization is based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and is the most important organization in fostering the control of small arms and in leading the efforts to stem violence in Latin America. Even Viva Rio, which is based only in one country, is influential in spurring disarmament activities in the neighboring countries especially, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina.<sup>64</sup>

NGOs and their specialized agendas are working with increasing sophistication to further their interests in international forums. They are particularly focused on framing agendas, mobilizing constituencies, and monitoring compliance. Two overarching factors facilitating the work of NGOs have been identified.<sup>65</sup> First, they work in an environment with broad allegiances ranging from traditional national fidelity to transnational issues that are not bound to the notion of national territory. Second, they now have the possibility of direct action and influence through the internet. Other authors advance the idea that for the understanding of the impact of NGOs in international relations, it is essential to draw from cognitive elements such as ideas, perceptions, preferences, and learning processes. NGOs can concentrate primarily on one issue, in contrast to states. NGOs generally address principle-based questions that are either disregarded by states or linked to immediate strategic issues. An example of this is the Biting the Bullet Project that gathers three important think tank non-governmental institutes, the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), International Alert, and Saferworld. The three are part of IANSA. These three international institutions are among the most important actors in the global

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and Peter J. Spiro, "New Global Communities: Nongovernmental Organizations in International Decision-Making Institutions," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No.1 (1994), pp. 45-56.

<sup>64</sup> See [www.vivario.org.br](http://www.vivario.org.br) and [www.desarme.org](http://www.desarme.org).

<sup>65</sup> Spiro, "New Global Communities."

movement to curb the proliferation and availability of small arms. This is because they have a systematic way to raising awareness towards the problems associated to the proliferation and the illicit traffic of small arms, through a series of “briefings” and also through the organization of meetings among governments and the civil society.

There are several elements that make NGOs effective diffusing ideas.<sup>66</sup> First, NGOs usually focus on one issue at a time. This enables them to be focused rather than dispersed among several issues such as states. Second, NGOs exert a kind of pressure that reminds states that they are morally subjected to international pressure. Third, NGOs might represent unique spaces of information dissemination and sharing of new ideas. This allows NGOs to be organizational avenues for citizens as well as states for pressing global issues. At the international level, NGOs may mediate for several national delegations and strategize with world leaders to broaden the scope of their influence.<sup>67</sup> NGOs might also operate in two types of realms: intergovernmental (OSCE, OAS, etc.) and the “NGO self-created space” which consists of a nascent international civil society where the agendas are self-controlled.<sup>68</sup> In the small arms case, despite the relative prominence NGOs assumed in the process of controlling the spread of small arms, these organizations cannot act alone. States have to be part of the efforts. Small arms, to a lesser extent than land mines, arouse strong feelings of national interest.<sup>69</sup>

NGOs can play a role in information awareness and exercise the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have most impact. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, NGOs began documenting the problem of land mines and numerous studies appeared. In 1993, the same year that studies started to appear on small arms

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<sup>66</sup> Clark, “Non-Governmental Organizations and their Influence.”

<sup>67</sup> Here defined (by Ingo Take) as states that actively promote the process of international cooperation and, at the national level, implement laws that provide models for the international level.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, “Non-Governmental Organizations and their Influence.”



proliferation, an U.S. State Department study estimated that land mines kill or wound 150 people per week. Then another revised study from the same source claimed that land mines maim or kill an estimated 500 people per week. The U.S. State Department reported that the revised estimates testify to the role of international activists as catalysts for informing the states. In addition, land mines case confirms that a perception of a crisis or shock is a crucial factor in precipitating ideational and normative change.

### **Epistemic Communities**

The international action and the global and regional norm building on small arms and light weapons control were preceded by the dissemination of knowledge regarding the problems connected to the spread and proliferation of such weapons. In the small arms case, it was the conventional arms trade epistemic community that worked as a catalyst for research to be refocused from weapons of mass destruction and larger conventional weapons system on smaller conventional weapons systems. Nonetheless, the formation of a specific small arms epistemic community happened when the issue was already established in the international agenda. The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey functions as a clearing house that unites the many researchers around the world devoting efforts to profile the problems caused by small arms proliferation and devise measures to tackle it. They do not engage in activism, as do some of the other nongovernmental actors. They provide information and influence small arms policymaking. However, in the case of small arms, an epistemic community alone would not be enough to influence all the relevant actors to adopt policy change, at the national, regional, and international levels. This is because it is clearly a global topic with many interconnected

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<sup>69</sup> Karp, “Arming Ethnic Conflict.”

dimensions. In addition, for policy change, the participation of many levels of society is required, above and beyond governments.

Most scholarship on norms diffusion make at least a passing reference to the influence of epistemic communities in diffusing or creating new norms in the domestic or international arenas. The idea behind epistemic communities did not go unnoticed in international relations studies. The importance of highlighting it here is related to the fact that it connects the study of actors and the mechanisms used for the diffusion of ideas.

Proponents of the epistemic community highlight that the manner in which decision makers define state interests and formulate policy on technical and complex issues is related to how the issue is framed by the advisers policy makers turn to. The authors seek to examine how networks of experts define complex problems helping states to identify their interests, and how they frame the issue for the public debate. The authors demonstrate that the diffusion of ideas might be a powerful shaper of new patterns of behavior and that the epistemic communities approach is a research tool for empirical analysis of the role of ideas and reason in international relations. The focus on epistemic communities enables analysts to lessen conditions of uncertainty in states' pursuit of interests. Epistemic communities are sources of policy innovation, channels through which policies diffuse, and catalysts in the political and institutional processes leading to behavior change. Epistemic communities also contribute to increasing the transparency of action and development of shared judgments converging around policy coordination. Therefore, "Epistemic communities are channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country".<sup>70</sup> Before states can agree on whether and how to deal collectively with a specific problem, they must reach

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<sup>70</sup> Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities,"p. 27.

consensus about the nature and scope of the problem and also about the manner in which the problem relates to other issues.

The members of an epistemic community are bonded together by their shared belief or faith in the verity and applicability of particular forms of knowledge or specific truths. They also share a common way of knowing, patterns of reasoning, policy project drawing on shared values, causal beliefs, the use of shared discursive practices, and shared commitment to the application and production of knowledge. The members of an epistemic community distinguish themselves from other influence-seeking groups because of the essence binding them together. The common motivations that drive its members to seek political influence, however, must originate outside the political sphere; i.e., in their shared professional or academic socialization.<sup>71</sup>

## **MECHANISMS FOR NORMS DIFFUSION**

Virtually every empirical study analyzing the spread of norms focuses on two variables, entrepreneurship and coherence, in addition to the environmental conditions already mentioned. Most studies approach the several existing mechanisms through phases of ideational or norm evolution. A fruitful approach to the “norm life cycle” appears to be one that advances the norm cycle with each mechanism associated with the norm building.<sup>72</sup> First, the origins or emergence of international norms in which the main mechanism of diffusion happens through norm entrepreneurs. Second, the processes through which norms influence state and nonstate behavior (norm cascades) in which the main mechanism is socialization. Third, the process through which

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<sup>71</sup> Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas, “Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 368-390.

<sup>72</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics.”

norms become internalized in which emulation plays a key role as a mechanism through which we can perceive how many actors partake the same assessment.

“New norms never enter a normative vacuum but instead emerge in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms and perceptions of interest.”<sup>73</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink point to the fact that NGOs or IGOs dealing with powerful states are rarely able to coerce agreement on a norm; rather they must persuade. States are not equal when it comes to normative weight. Empirical studies nevertheless suggest that the tipping of the threshold point rarely occurs before one third of states has accepted the norm. It also matters which states adopt the norm. This feature depends on the issue as well.<sup>74</sup> “What constitutes a “critical state” will vary from issue to issue, but one criterion is that critical states are those without which the achievement of the substantive norm goal is compromised.”<sup>75</sup> States might also be “critical” because they have a certain moral stature. Finnemore and Sikkink mention a “contagion” effect for norm acceptance. They elaborate on the contagion effect, actually describing a process of international socialization intended to bring about change in the conduct of reluctant states. Socialization, therefore, is the dominant mechanism for norm acceptance. Socialization might occur in the following sequence: emulation, praise (for behavior that conforms to group norms), and ridicule (for deviation from these norms). These steps can be identified in the strategies adopted by the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines. The last phase can be seen in the widely disseminated poster of a child, mines victim, and the phrase, “USA, don’t walk away!”

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 897.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 901.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The main norm diffusion mechanisms are: persuasion, individual advocacy, social pressure, constitutive cognitive frames,<sup>76</sup> emulation, reputation,<sup>77</sup> socialization, teaching, discourse, political rhetoric,<sup>78</sup> information, expertise, professional training,<sup>79</sup> lobbying,<sup>80</sup> iterated behavior, habit,<sup>81</sup> and coalition building.<sup>82</sup> It seems that the consensus is that persuasion and individual advocacy springing from norm entrepreneurship are the most important mechanisms for normative change. Some authors have argued vehemently that persuasion should be considered fundamentally important to norm building. Persuasion has been argued to be the single most important mechanism to change actor preferences.<sup>83</sup> There is also the argument that normative claims become more powerful and prevail by being persuasive.<sup>84</sup>

In particular reference to the construction of cognitive frames, Richard Price suggests that firsthand and graphic experiences of human tragedies are very successful in mobilizing political action. The tragedy mobilized millions of people worldwide and this compelled and persuaded political change. Therefore, politicians were taught about land mines through moral persuasion. As Price argues, this was a relatively easy task compared to attributing responsibility starvation

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<sup>76</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics"; Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms"; Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*; Rodger A. Payne, "Persuasion, Frames and Norm Construction," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2001) pp. 37-61.

<sup>77</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics"; Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights"; Neta Crawford, "Decolonization as an International Norm," in Laura Reed and Carl Kaysen, *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention*, pp. 37-61, (Cambridge: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993); Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*; Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Janice E. Thomson, "State Practices, International Norms, and the Decline of Mercenarism," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34 (1990), pp. 23-47, Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>78</sup> Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights"; Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*; Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*.

<sup>79</sup> Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, "International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1997), pp. 473-95; Cortell and Davis, "Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms"; Robert McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics."

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen, ed., *Bringing Transnational Relations Back in: Nonstate Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>83</sup> Payne, "Persuasion, Frames and Norm Construction."

for instance. Price reiterates that although elements of many of the mechanisms cited here are evident in the generation of a norm proscribing land mines, he argues that the “role of moral persuasion and the social pressure arising from identity politics and emulation are particularly crucial.”<sup>85</sup>

The disseminating of information for initiating the agenda-setting and issue-framing processes is a key norm-building mechanism. Therefore, this involves the generation of knowledge about the issue, and the dissemination of information.<sup>86</sup> “A crucial way that transnational actors have sought to teach states that land mines are a problem is through generating and publicly disseminating information to governments, and wider society alike. In the absence of such instruction, wide recognition of the staggering number of land mines worldwide and the number of suffering victims would not have been apparent in the first place”.<sup>87</sup> In the small arms case, the studies that appeared during the first half of the 1990s, as previously mentioned, were crucial to outline the problems regarding small arms. Subsequent work in promoting efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons was essential to socialize new actors to be engaged in the process. This sheds light on teaching as a mechanism.

The small arms issue has characteristics that are multidimensional in approach and multifaceted in nature. This has led to the participation of a large array of actors including governments, research and advocacy organizations, transnational advocacy networks, churches, lobbying groups, and industries who came to be involved. Some of these might be considered interest groups, epistemic communities, norm entrepreneurs, or still other types of groups

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<sup>84</sup> Finnemore, “*National Interests in International Society*.”

<sup>85</sup> Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights,” p. 616.

<sup>86</sup> Krause, et al., *Activists Beyond Borders*; and Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities.”

<sup>87</sup> Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights,” p. 621.

interested in reducing the lethality of conflicts, stemming violence or ultimately ending human suffering. In most cases, these actors were socialized to learn about a problem affecting them in their societies. The weapons themselves are not the cause of the problems and the suffering. However, their sheer presence exacerbates conflicts and violence immensely. Small arms control has highlighted the necessity of an unprecedented type of cooperation among the many actors.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article discusses how small arms control assumed a position of attention in the international agenda and outlines norm-building as a research framework to the analysis of small arms and land mines control.

In the case of the small arms issue, the role of some individuals was central not only to frame the issue as a topic of concern for states, but to elevate it on the international agenda. Therefore, two norm entrepreneurs, Michael Klare and Edward Lurance were spurred the issue and acted as important driving forces on raising awareness and norm building. Individual norm entrepreneurship can also be seen in the land mines case, where the chief of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines was awarded the Nobel Prize. In the case of small arms, despite the relative prominence NGOs assumed in the processes of small arms control norm building, there is a significant difference with the land mines case in which prominence on the international agenda is inextricably associated with the efforts of civil society. NGOs played a key role in raising awareness and generating credible information that had enormous political impact. The generation concerted knowledge regarding both issues started in the early 1990s. This was an essential impetus to initiate policy-oriented action on both issues and trigger

normative change. However, in the land mines case, NGOs were key in documenting and revising the figures of governmental studies. In the small arms case there were some important studies published mostly by arms control and field practitioners in the beginning of the 1990s. The study that crystallized the nature of the problem was the 1997 United Nations Panel of Experts on Small Arms Report. This report helped to solidify the state-led side of small arms building. Concerted efforts to provide information related to small arms, in all aspects, came in 1999, once the issue was already firmly established on the international agenda, with the creation of the Small Arms Survey.

The rise of the small arms and land mines issues in the international agenda, from the high politics realm of the security of states, proves to be a fascinating phenomenon that can be studied from a norm-building perspective. The land mines campaign is undoubtedly powerful evidence that the quest for civilizing world politics through principled ideas is possible and divorced of realpolitik interests. This is a phenomenon that is unaccounted for by mainstream international relations theories. Small arms control calls for unprecedented types of cooperation among perhaps the largest array of actors ever, in the quest for stemming violence and reduce human suffering across the world.



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