

## **Millennium Development Goals and the Enigma of Arms Trafficking: A Critical Challenge to 21st Century African Security**

B.O.G. Nwanolue

Department of Political Science, Anambra State University, Uli, Anambra State, Nigeria

---

**Abstract:** For the past 3 decades, Africa is saddled with circumstances of armed conflicts of all kinds. Hence, socio-economic and political development of the continent becomes a complex task to actualize. Territorial borders of some member nations have become porous following wars that were fought. As a result, arms of all kinds are illegally transferred across the African borders, equipping either the rebels or government forces; on one hand to intensify armed hostilities in the continent. Equally, the arm trafficking provides ample opportunities for civilians to gain access to small and light weapons. This poses a great threat to contemporary African security. Therefore, the study examines the concerns of Millennium Development Goals with regard to the actualization of arms security in 21st century Africa. Methodologically, data for this study were gathered from secondary and primary sources. The design was based on the ex-post facto analysis. Hence, it is the findings that arms trafficking across the territorial borders of some African countries have affected the general security of the continent in such a way that economic stability, political advancement and social harmonization have remained complex task to be achieved by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Accordingly, the study recommends that the United Nations should make the MDGs more practical oriented in order to capture the security crisis of developing countries, especially Africa that is faced with the enigma of arms trafficking across its territorial borders.

**Key words:** Civilians, rebels, ex-post facto analysis, security, economic stability, political advancement

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Nations, in its tangible efforts and the conjugation of ideas to actualize practical development among member states in 21st century, has articulated 8 major development goals to radically propel the forces of these objectives. As such, 192 countries of the world and 23 international organizations, according to Akhangaki (2007) welcome this moulded ambition with ease. Such goals include: To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality rates; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS; malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. The actualization of these development goals on or before the year 2015 would be a giant stride, especially on the areas of environmental sustainability with the obvious territorial insecurity on the borders of the regional countries mainly occasioned by international and non-international armed conflicts of all kinds.

Increase in armed hostilities across the globe has preponderantly orchestrated vigilance and combat readiness by Nation States against attacks from enemy territories. In other to ensure proper military fortification

and impenetrable security by either the government or rebel forces, Farah and Braun (2007) assert that small arms and light weapons are illegally imported from developed countries for the actualization of one interest or another. This illegal importation of arms from one country to another is usually referred to as arms trafficking. In other words, arms trafficking transcend the territorial borders of the transacting parties in such a way that they beat the security operatives mounted at the border for such purposes. The customs, the immigration, the police, the army, the navy, the air force, etc., are conventionally placed to guard against such unhealthy exercises but the reverse seems to be the case.

Again, the 1997 report of the United Nations panel of governmental experts on small arms provides a more conceptual clarification which has become internationally accepted. This distinguishes between small arms (Revolvers and self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns) which are weapons designed for personal use and light weapons (Heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tanks guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres <100 mm) which are designed for use by several

persons serving as a unit. Ammunition and explosives also form an integral part of small arms and light weapons used in conflict. Arms trafficking should not be confused with legal commerce in firearms for private use or for military or police procurement. What constitutes legal trade in firearms varies widely, depending on local and national laws (Small arms survey; the small arms trade in Latin America, NACLA Report on the Americas, March/April, 2008) (Small Arms Survey, 2008).

In the hobbesian anarchy that has been the norm in Somalia, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa and Libya to mention but a few since the late 1980s, the proliferation of weapons has been associated not only with the pursuit of political power but also with international terrorism and the protection and furtherance of economic objectives in the region. Somalia lies at the heart of regional arms trafficking networks that include governments and private traders in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Developed over many years, this market relies on traditional trade routes, military supply lines and corruptible government actors to provide material support to clansmen, warlords and militants who purchase or barter for small arms such as Kalashnikov rifles, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and larger weapons systems such as anti-aircraft guns and technicals (Armored pick-up trucks with weapons mounted in the back). Currently sustained and developed primarily by a mix of opportunistic businessmen and foreign governments who are strengthening local proxies, the arms trade in and around Africa serves as a reliable, highly adaptable and readily accessible wellspring of material that feeds regional conflicts.

For years, the movement of weapons was governed by the cold war and the insurgencies that emerged throughout Latin America. Governments as well as guerrilla groups in Central and South America sought to arm themselves using mostly US, Russian and Chinese weapons. Jenniscotte (2006) posits that in some cases, the United States seeking to hide arms transfers, moved Russian weapons such as the Avtomat Kalashnikov-47 (AK-47) assault rifle through developing countries like Israel to camouflage their sales to illegal groups. The Soviets, meanwhile, moved weapons through Cuba and later Nicaragua to various African countries. The arms trade flourished and distribution patterns that are still prevalent today were established.

The end of the wars in Central America, combined with the fall of the Soviet Union, has opened new doors for the arms trade. Other weapons came via the old Soviet bloc countries, often trafficked through Central America in particular Panama which became a hub for Colombia bound weapons to various parts of developing countries which Africa is the chief recipient.

Accordingly, this study raises a vital issue as regards the actualization of security by Millennium Development Goals on the territorial integrity of Africa. Hence, external or internal security may be a tangible illusion without addressing the lingering enigma of arms trafficking at the territorial borders of African South of Sahara.

#### **ARMS TRANSFERS AND TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA**

Africa continues to have the greatest number of armed conflicts than every other continent around the world. In mid-2001, latent or open hostilities affected Angola, Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DROC), Djibouti, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria-Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania-Zanzibar, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The influx of light weapons financed by cash, diamonds or other commodities did not cause Africa's wars but it has prolonged and made them more lethal.

Given the number of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, it is not surprising that they cumulatively have claimed at least 7-8 million lives. In the views of Goham (2007) by 2001, >3.5 million of the >14 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world were in Africa. Of the approximately 21 million internally displaced people in the world >10 million are Africans. Nations and manufacturers eager to dispose of arsenals of arms made superfluous by post-cold war political developments and technological innovations continue to view Africa as an attractive market. The international community's inability to control arms transfers and trafficking contributes to the persistence of these devastating conflicts. African leaders also have acknowledged that their porous borders and ineffective national legal codes governing firearms commerce also play a role in the continent's continued vulnerability to opportunistic arms merchants.

Apart from undermining the promise of African democratization and development, armed conflicts contribute to political decay, facilitate state collapse, cause widespread human rights violations, generate refugees and internally displaced persons and exacerbate famine conditions. Conflicts also divert scarce resources away from social services, disrupt trade, discourage tourism and contribute to the breakdown of family structures. The pervasiveness and persistence of conflict also have grave psychological consequences as children are traumatized or become accustomed to a culture of violence.

The arms market continues to offer many opportunities to those who possess assets other than hard currency to finance weapons purchases. Diamonds,

other gemstones and minerals enable cash poor governments and insurgents the ability to acquire arms. In Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, soldiers from Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe enrich themselves by plundering natural resources such as diamonds, columbite-tantalite (coltan) and ivory. Insurgent groups such as the Congolese Liberation Front (FLC) and the Mai Mai engage in similar practices. In West Africa, the sale of conflict diamonds smuggled out of Sierra Leone has fuelled the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) insurgency and enriched the guerrillas' regional patrons. Diamond smuggling and arms trafficking funded by oil revenues yield substantial profits to arms merchants willing to sell to one or both parties to the Angolan Civil War (Nwankwo, 2003).

International efforts to control the bartering of natural resources such as diamonds and other precious stones, coltan, timber and other commodities for weapons have done little more than drive much of the illicit trade deeper into the shadows.

On the positive side, insurgents in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola may not be smuggling out as many diamonds as they previously were able to and the cost of the weapons they purchase probably also has risen.

#### **NATURE AND CHARACTER OF ARMS TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA**

Arms trafficking in Africa are indeed an intricate task to come by. Several efforts made by international communities, to that effect have, yielded no impact, despite the arms embargo placed by the United Nations. For instance, arms merchant like Victor Butt, a Russian national based in United Arab Emirates has come to symbolize the arms trafficking problem in sub-Saharan Africa. He owns at least 5 airlines that fly 60 aircraft and employ some 300 people. Over the past several years, Butt repeatedly has demonstrated an ability to deliver weapons and other military supplies to clients throughout Africa. Currently, he operates in Angola, Cameroon, DROC, Kenya, Libya, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda.

International efforts to arrest Butt or curtail his operations have thus far been unsuccessful. Butt and other arms traffickers transport weapons and other military supplies through Africa by a variety of routes sometimes directly, often through one or more transshipment points. These nodes comprise an elaborate network of options for arms dealers who wish to keep their activities private. Yoram (2004) posits that some of the more frequently used African airfields transited by

Butt and others include Entebbe, Goma, Kigali and Luanda. African seaports used by arms traffickers include Aseb, Beira, Conakry, Dar-es-Salaam, Djibouti, Durban, Luanda, Merca, Mombasa, Monrovia and Nacala. After arrival, arms are forwarded to their destination by road, rail, air or ferry. For example, shipments through Dar-es-Salaam normally are sent by rail to Mwanza, a port on Lake Victoria and then loaded onto a ferry for Port Bell in southern Uganda or other regional destinations.

Further, many of Africa's pastoral groups are threatened by the proliferation of small arms that makes conflicts with their neighbors more lethal. A typical example concerns the Karimojong in Northeast Uganda who for centuries relied on traditional weapons when engaged in cattle rustling and clan warfare. Such fighting claimed relatively few lives and was settled eventually by elders.

In continuation, the proliferation of illegal firearms in Kenya according to Mancah and Jenuke (2010) has reached crisis proportions. A recent study of Kenya by South Africa's Institute for Security Studies indicates that black marketers sell some 11,000 guns annually most of which enter Kenya from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. According to Kenya's Chief Licensing Firearms Officer, 75% of the country is awash with illicit arms. As a result, gun-related incidents rose by 200% in 1995 (most recent available figures) over the previous year. Conditions in Nairobi, a city of some 2.8 million people are particularly worrisome. Guns are increasingly used in car-jackings, kidnappings, rapes, muggings and robberies. Reportedly, Somali gun dealers in the Eastleigh section of Nairobi regularly rent weapons for an afternoon to anyone who can pay their fee.

In mid 2000, the Kenya police reported that they were recovering between 1,800 and 2,000 unlicensed guns per month in Nairobi. One year later, there still were an estimated 5,000 illegal firearms in circulation in Nairobi or one illegal weapon for every 560 Nairobi residents. This figure does not include unrecorded sales that are undoubtedly much higher. Gun-related crimes probably would continue to escalate as the police lack the resources to stem the flow of weapons into Nairobi.

Nigeria is a significant actor both as a producer and consumer of weapons. For instance, South African and Russian arms manufacturers visited Nigeria in early 2001 to tender proposals to rehabilitate and expand Nigeria's Defense Industries Corporation (DICON). Press reports also suggested an eagerness to acquire arms that may have involved at least one unorthodox and politically suspect arms transaction. Nigerian police in late May, 2001, seized a shipment of weapons at the port of Apapa that allegedly originated in Pakistan and were purchased

with the assistance of unnamed Indian agents by several retired Nigerian generals with links to the late General Abacha.

Equally, sophisticated arms were intercepted and confiscated at various strategic points in Nigeria between 2002 and 2011. Such strategic places include Apapa-Wharf in Lagos, Aminu Kano International Airport, Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Obolafor-Nsukka in Enugu State, Niger bride-head in Onitsha, Anambra State, Patani in Delta State, Port Harcourt Sea Port to mention but a few (Coubrey, 2009).

The intensification of hostilities along the Guinean-Liberian-Sierra Leone border has heightened demand for arms in that already saturated area. Liberian dissidents operating across the Guinean border in 2010 allegedly received arms and ammunition delivered to the port of Conakry. Several reports have suggested Liberian timber exports increasingly are used to finance and smuggle weapons further facilitating Taylor's ability to evade UN sanctions directed against Liberia's exchange of conflict diamonds for arms.

At the end of the day, neither African or non-African nations nor the international community has been willing to levy painful political, economic or legal penalties against individuals or countries to dissuade them from selling arms to or within Africa.

#### **STATISTICAL FIGURES OF ARMS TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA**

Undoubtedly, Africa continues to experience more armed conflicts than any other continent. For instance, it is estimated that there are 650,000 light weapons and small arms in circulation in Guinea-Bissau alone. The widespread weapon possession among civilians is a fall-out from years of war. Other factors for the increase in weapon possession among civilians are a lack of border control, weak rule of law and sub-regional allies that allow weapons to cross the border.

Africa has suffered mostly due to the effects of the arms trafficking. The evils of this trade on the continent are vast and a source of worry. Greed has made many individuals and terrorist groups acquire weapons and arms, raping the continent of its natural resources while fanning wars and conflicts. Bond (2009) emphasizes that the import and export of small arms were made illegal in 16 West African states in June, 2006 when ECOWAS adopted a binding convention on small arms, light weapons and other associated materials. Government representatives from 42 African countries agreed to sign an international treaty on banning cluster bombs. The African Union through NEPAD has also mechanisms to mobilize states in disarmament and non-proliferation of

arms and weapons. In 2010, the following statistical figures show that small and light weapons were illegally in circulation in these African countries: Guinea; 650,000, Liberia; 297,000, Sierra Leone; 456,000, Uganda; 362,000, Rwanda; 254,000, Burundi; 218,000, South Africa; 1.350,000; fire arms, Cote d'Ivoire; 1.870,000, Sudan; 3.920,000, Libya; 1.960,000, Zimbabwe; 892,000, Kenya; 725,000, Niger; 204,000, Algeria; 1.900,000, Congo DR; 915,000, Somalia; 966,000, Togo; 119,000, Eritrea; 608,000, Ethiopia; 174,000, Tunisia; 586,000 and Nigeria; 5.830,000 arms.

Small arms trafficking in the 21st century are nothing if not a global operation. In 2002, traffickers acquired 5,000 AK-47s from Yugoslavian army stocks and moved them from Serbia to Liberia under the guise of a legal transaction with Nigeria. One of the planes used in this shipment came from Ukraine and made a refueling stop in Libya while en route. That same year, a group of West African gun smugglers persuaded the Nicaraguan government to sell it 3,000 assault rifles and 2.5 million rounds of ammunition by pretending to be brokering the deal on behalf of the Panamanian National Police. Instead, the illegal goods were routed to South America and sold to the United Self-defense Forces of Columbia, an international terrorist organization (Kwakwa, 2002).

These and thousands of similar incidents combine to make black market small arms trafficking a \$1 billion a year global business in Africa. But the financial profit comes at a tremendous cost to the African security. Some 500,000 people are killed each year by the 639 million small arms in circulation and in some conflicts >80% of casualties are caused by these weapons, especially in African South of the Sahara. Moreover, small arms are today the weapons of choice for all warring parties around the globe, whether they are government armies, rebel forces or terrorists because they are cheap, widely available, extremely lethal, simple to use, durable, portable and concealable.

#### **MDGs AND ERADICATION OF ARMS TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA**

Peace and security in Africa require a strong commitment by states in the sub-region together with State suppliers of weapons to expand their individual and collective efforts to eradicate weapons trafficking. Such efforts must include greater commitment by the states of the sub-region to implement global instruments and to strengthen their capacity to identify and combat those involved in illicit brokering activities. These instruments include the UN Millennium Development Goals to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects; the UN firearms protocol and the International tracing instrument.

In addition, African states should make the best possible use of tools and expertise made available by the world body, including from the UN office for disarmament affairs and the UN Regional centre for peace and disarmament in Africa. The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that today's conflicts take place within rather than between nations and are fought with light rather than heavy weapons (Mmaduabum, 2008). He further opines that the global illicit arms trade is estimated to be worth \$200-300 million annually and Africa, the most profitable market for smugglers, suffers the largest number of casualties because of it. Even small amounts of arms can undermine the socio-economic progress of a nation, break the state's monopoly on the use of force or create a tipping point in political (or military) stalemates. In fact, illicit arms fuel the violence that undermines security, development and justice in the present day Africa. For instance, Nigeria, since January, 2011 has been in a state of unpredictability and uncertainty. Terrorism is becoming the order of the day. Innocent people are killed by explosives on daily basis and properties destroyed. What more, the infiltration of illegal arms and light weapons is such a jeopardy that the country is sitting on the keg of disintegration.

#### **ARMS TRAFFICKING: A THREAT TO AFRICAN SECURITY**

The proliferation and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons continued to upset international peace and security with all of the pernicious consequences it had on states in a broader sense of the term, given the negative impact on all types of infrastructure. The Democratic Republic of the Congo as a post-conflict country in the views of Schindler and Toman (2010) still has fresh memories of the devastating effect of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The main thrust of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals on environmental sustainability should be to prevent, combat and eradicate the proliferation of such weapons at the national, regional and global level. In terms of combating the scourge, the Democratic of the Congo had set up during 2008 a national commission to monitor small arms and light weapons and to reduce armed violence. A permanent secretary had also been appointed to a national commission for that monitoring. In addition, a national 5 year programme had been drafted and those activities should lead to a national plan on small arms and light weapons.

Combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in Africa would not be feasible without

international cooperation and assistance. The reason is that it is the developed countries that manufacture and supply arms to African countries on demand (legally or illegally). In the same vein, African countries should mobilize resources and expertise and to provide assistance for the full implementation of the MDGs, especially on trafficking of small arms and light weapons in the continent.

Some countries still faced difficulties in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, especially when it comes to security and environmental matters. Poverty, diseases, acute hunger and instabilities of all kinds still threaten some countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Togo, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, etc., in the midst of these, illegal possession of arms, leading to morbid insecurity is the order of the day. In continuation, many other African countries face shortage of funds arising from orchestrated economic crunch or insufficient technology and a lack of human and other resources (Akintola, 2005). The United Nations should further strengthen international cooperation and assistance with a focus on legislative assistance, law enforcement capacity, marking and tracing assistance and information-sharing to minimize this arms misnomer on the territories of Africa. In addition, the MDGs and the International tracing instrument should remain the foundation for international cooperation and assistance. The United Nations should play a leading role in that regard. Coordinated regional measures should be taken in accordance with the conditions of specific regions.

Moreover, African Governments should assume primary responsibility in international cooperation and assistance. Countries in a position to do so, especially developed countries should be more active in helping others to strengthen capacity-building and assistance programmes should be more targeted on practical minimization of arms trafficking in the African Continent. Condorelli (2007) posits that the importance of combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and eliminating their trade should be emphasized by the United Nations and other relevant regional and sub regional organizations. This will be possible and could only be effective if activities were conducted with synergy and collaboration.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The United Nations efforts to curb small arms proliferation are clearly failing across the globe, especially in African South of the Sahara. The Millennium Development Goals would be meaningless if the year 2015

comes and goes without any sophisticated developmental strides actualized. However, arms trafficking is a very intricate concept which the United Nations has not understood the nature and character of the networks that it is trying to disrupt. These complex and innovative networks according to Ajala and Sagay (2007) have evolved in the shadows of globalization and are quick to exploit legitimate international channels, systems and infrastructures where they already exist and are equally quick to create new ones where they do not exist. Consequently, we must start thinking of these shadow networks as deeply integrated not only with one another but with the entire global economy. By so doing, the United Nations through the Millennium Development Goals should start crafting a strategic policy for combating the illicit small arms trade in developing countries, especially Africa.

Finally, the inclusion of the question of combating illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in the development strategies of all states and encouraged real cooperation between all states in order to coordinate a plan of combat for the good of all humanity should be fortified by all regional and sub regional organizations across the globe. Hence, small arms are made to kill so the main problem is not the exchange of merchandise but the human toll these weapons caused. These arms cause the most deaths in African conflicts. Small arms and light weapons had become weapons of mass destruction. This is the right time the United Nations should insist on the fact that this issue should be dealt with bearing in mind the negative effects of these weapons in the present day African security.

#### REFERENCES

- Ajala, J. and P. Sagay, 2007. *The Effects of Illegal Arms Trafficking*. Oxford University Press, London.
- Akhangaki, P.U., 2007. *Armed Conflicts in West Africa*. Tachlot, Nairobi.
- Akintola, R., 2005. *Crisis in Africa: The Liberian Conflicts*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bond, J.E., 2009. *Arms Trafficking*. Princeton University Press, Jersey.
- Condorelli, L., 2007. *The United Nations and International Humanitarian Law: Actes du Colloque International a L'occasion du Cinquantieme Anniversaire de L'Onu*. Pedone, Paris.
- Coubrey, H., 2009. *The Politics of Small Arms and Light Weapons*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Farah, D. and S. Braun, 2007. *Merchant of Death: Money, Guns, Planes and the Man Who Makes War Possible*, New York, USA.
- Goham, L., 2007. *The Law Of Armed Conflicts: A Feminist Perspective in Liberia*. Kluwer Publishers, Netherlands.
- Jenniscotte, P.O., 2006. *International Law in Third World*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Kwakwa, E., 2002. *The International Law of Armed Conflict: Personal and Material Fields of Application*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, The Netherlands.
- Mancah and H. Jenuke, 2010. *The Law of Armed Conflicts: Liberia's Experience*. Oxford University Press, London.
- Mmaduabum, R., 2008. *State Neutrality, Belligerence in Armed Conflicts*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Nwankwo, J., 2003. *Modern Introduction to international Humanitarian Law*. Guanaco Publishers, England.
- Schindler, D. and J. Toman, 2010. *The Laws of Armed Conflicts*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, London.
- Small Arms Survey, 2008. *The small arms trade in Latin America*. NACLA Report on the Americas, March/April 2008. [http://www.cdi.org/pdfs/Small\\_Arms\\_Latin\\_America.pdf](http://www.cdi.org/pdfs/Small_Arms_Latin_America.pdf).
- Yoram, D., 2004. *The Conduct of Hostilities Under the law of International Armed Conflicts*. Cambridge University Press, London.