Introduction
Ghana has never experienced civil war and hopes to keep that historical record intact. Furthermore in the year 2000 Ghana did undergo a democratic change-over of government in spite of the potential for an upheaval following 2-terms of an elected government with antecedents in coup detat, military and quasi military rule. In 2004 there was a successful follow up democratic election. Thus Ghana’s recent political history seems to have reversed the infamous trend of eternal one-party governments in the African tradition.

Ghana is thus emerging internationally as a West African country leading a transformation for change in the areas of good political, economic & corporate governance as well as adherence to the millennium development goals in an atmosphere of relative peace. This perception has been bolstered by the fact that Ghana offered itself as one of the initial countries to undergo the African Peer Review process.

Ghana over the past few years has been actively engaged in helping to resolve conflicts in neighboring countries particularly in the context of chairmanship of Ecowas for two consecutive terms. We played a significant role in the Liberian & Cote d’Ivoire peace processes as well as the recent Togo situation while dealing with our own internal problems particularly in Northern Ghana.

The security agencies are collaborating to control small arms & light weapons [SALW] proliferation, and have succeeded in putting some local manufacturers under surveillance. Swoops of suspected hideouts of armed robbers, cordon & search for illegal weapons and checks at state armories are conducted to determine vulnerability.

Ghana understands the challenging role of initiating preventive and control measures to address the menace of arms proliferation and illicit use in Ghana and in the sub region in collaboration with our neighboring countries.
Ghana is also cognizant of the potential of arms proliferation to undermine political stability, the risks to human security, the reality of destabilization of governments, the threat to democracy and the developmental malaise that the SALW problem represents for the West African sub region.

Ghana thus views small arms control as a fundamental requisite for developmental initiatives

**Defining the Small arms problematic**

The problematic is most appropriately defined in a sub regional perspective. The upsurge of military coup detats and political destabilization in the sub region with attendant arms flows and underground infrastructure of illicit arms transfers is the context for concerted action.

Although the general levels of small arms proliferation in Ghana looks benign compared to the sub region, Ghana does have a gun production sub culture dating back to pre- colonial days.

Current law permits repair of small arms by gunsmiths, from which some have perfected the art of production.

It has been reported that to avoid detection and clamp down, illicit producers have set up networks of parts manufacture, each specializing in the production of specific components of the rifle. The components produced separately – barrel, butts trigger etc are later assembled at a secret location for distribution.

In most of West Africa there are cottage industries producing firearms. Originally set to meet local demands for hunting, these secret factories have grown in expertise and capacity to meet demands brought about by general insecurity and also feed criminal elements and rebels.

Furthermore, there is also reportedly in West Africa a syndicate of merchants and criminals in a vibrant underground economy beneath the general veneer that has created what has been described as a’ simmering crisis of proliferation’ with an illicit economic infrastructure that seems sophisticated and profitable.
In light of Ecowas moratorium against import, export & manufacture, the above scenario poses singular challenges with regards to policing capacity as well as penetrating the seeming impermeable secret social infrastructure in the communities that are supported by this activity.

Viewed from the perspective of the legality of worldwide arms production and the multibillion-dollar economy of this worldwide industry, the injunction of West African states against manufacture in the global scenario may well represent an anomaly and calls for critical thinking in addressing this issue in the upcoming Ecowas convention. The pertinent issue remains the effectiveness of the moratorium in addressing small arms proliferation in the sub region versus legalized control.

Ghana is geographically posited in a small arms dilemma. Ghana has long porous borders in a sub region with struggles for democracy, which have resulted in protracted conflicts and civil wars.

Ghana is thus playing hosts to a large and increasing population of refugees from the Mano River as well as immediate neighbors from Cote d’Ivoire and Togo. Recently refugees from Darfour attracted by Ghana’s reputation of peacefulness have arrived in one of the port cities. These inflows of refugees from active conflict zones have come with attendant illicit weapons.

Porous borders in an era of trade facilitation and lack of modern methods of detection and criminal sophistication in concealing weapons also renders Ghana susceptible to illicit arms transfers.

Furthermore the Ghana conflict assessment report reveals that military take overs led to arms inflows into the civilian population. Land and chieftaincy disputes account for small arms misuse and pockets of conflict zones in the country, which require vigilance. Some local Conflicts in Northern part of Ghana have become protracted and proved difficult to resolve.

Ghana has thus woken up from the doldrums of complacency about perceptions of peacefulness in the midst of sub regional turmoil to the reality of the challenges posed by small arms trafficking & proliferation.
An important mandate of the Ghana National Commission is to develop a National Action Plan for governmental adoption and implementation. This is the context within which the Ghana small arms commission has been provided support from PCASED for the ‘project for reinforcement of the capacities of the border guards at Ghana’s Western border’ and a pilot project in crisis prevention from UNDP/ BCPR [Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery] for the implementation of ‘Preparatory Assistance - Small Arms Reduction & Conflict Prevention Project’

Ghana is working on an integrated SALW control strategy which includes cross border control, legislative review, computerization of the registration process, and relevant research into the SALW problem in Ghana. This is to enable an understanding of the statistics of legally owned civil categorized arms as well as the dynamics of the underground economy of illicit production, its impact on proliferation, its contribution to armed robberies & tribal conflicts, as well as chieftaincy & land disputes in order to inform control initiatives.

Preventive development has been the underlying focus of the UNDP/BCPR and Ghana government small arms control collaboration.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE GHANA NATIONAL COMMISSION

Safer Africa has provided technical and capacity building assistance within the context of implementation of international regional & national conventions. A Training of Trainers workshop for senior security operatives has been completed. Capacity development has included strategic planning, identification of national priorities & effective inter-agency coordination.

Owing to the very remarkable and productive nature of the training of trainers workshop a report is being collated for publication and circulation to the security and government agencies to serve as an educational reference tool and would also be utilized as one of the source documents for training programmers at the district level.
Capacity Development of the National Firearms Bureau

The firearms bureau is undergoing the establishment of a national computerized database to provide a network for licensed and registered arms to facilitate monitoring. This will bring transparency and assist the police to trace firearms. It is also to facilitate regular inspections of armories and stock levels of licensed dealers as well as compliance to current ban on imports.

Stocktaking / ARMS COLLECTION

An armoury security and data collection exercise has been undertaken in sample Police armories in all regional capitals. Collation of data from police armories on civilian categorized arms is to expedite pending cases and facilitate systemic weapons collection and destruction in collaboration with police and military as well as the judicial establishment.

This exercise is also to facilitate the analysis of the ratio of locally manufactured to imported weapons in criminal usage prior to destruction. The statistical data will inform legislative review & policy formulation.

We have also initiated research into the phenomena of licit weapons that become illicit in order to address the lapses and mechanics of transmutation

FOCUS on Control of illicit Production

The commission has initiated useful dialogue with blacksmiths. This has yielded insights into support measures that can be provided to control the levels of illicit production. It has also highlighted inherent contradictions in declaring local production illicit while imports are permissible although there is a current ban. The Exception clause in the ECOWAS Moratorium however allows State imports. This has implications for policy & legislative review.
A promise by some blacksmiths association to ‘Stop illicit production’ has yielded much applause. The challenges remain how to transform the rhetoric of the blacksmiths to stop producing into the reality of reduced and eventual eradication of illicit production and how to preserve entrepreneurial skill and redirect illicit manufacture to productive economic activity with ready markets.

We are anticipating a comprehensive action plan to introduce training and support measures to actualize conversion of skills to other viable alternatives.

The Commission has engaged ongoing active and spirited discourse regarding the status of SALW in the country with some members expressing the opinion that there is an active crisis of proliferation in Ghana and the sub region.

There is a growing measure of support within the security agencies for consideration of the issue of legalization of production as a means of controlling proliferation. This is based on the perceived levels of illicit production with an infrastructure, which is entrenched.

Commission members have reached a consensus to review the issue of legalization pending the report from the Baseline survey with informed caution on the transmutation of the moratorium into a convention

We believe some derivative questions are important for consideration by Ecowas governments & civil society stakeholders leading up to the Ecowas small arms convention, which will replace the moratorium.

**Will legalization lead to effective control mechanisms?**

**What credible and viable alternatives are available with similar economic benefits to dissuade illicit production?**

**Does the governmental injunction not to manufacture under the Ecowas moratorium prevent governments from legalizing local production?**
**Awareness Campaign**

Our overall goal in launching an awareness campaign is to build partnerships on human security. We have initiated a mass movement of people against illicit arms to reduce the demand for weapons and to safeguard our democracy. Thus the imperative of control has been posited as a joint effort of individuals to report on illicit SALW activities, Security agencies to arrest, the judiciary to prosecute and Communities to refrain from usage as a means of resolving differences. We have significantly asked members of the media to join us in this endeavor as mouthpieces of the battle cry for developmental security and so far they are with us.

A call to establish anti arms groups in schools, interludes of cultural drumming & dramatizations by youth groups within the program, and a showing of the documentary ‘Let’s join hands’ with graphic depictions of small arms misuse which has received rapt public attention has added to the very successful launch of the campaign.

**Baseline Survey –**

We have also initiated the conduct of a survey to provide comprehensive overview of the SALW situation in the country and a preliminary report has been produced. The final report which will have the input of ‘small arms survey’ [SAS] a research institution based in Geneva will be utilized to design institutional strengthening programs and propose governmental policy and implementation plans to address the goal of reducing armed violence and combating small arms & light weapons proliferation.

**LEGISLATION**

Consultations are underway on the need to enhance legal controls through Legislative amendment & harmonization. Ghana’s proposed draft Legislation will deal inter alia with tighter controls on licensed arms dealers, oversight mechanism for transfers from entry points to armories to prevent transit leakages and stipulate tough mandatory sentences for violations. There is also advocacy for imposed limits an individual can legally possess & minimum training requirements.
At an Ecowas conference on illicit brokering and trafficking held in Abuja in 2004, the primary focus was the establishment of a regulatory framework for the sub regional initiative on small arms including harmonized legislation. Prototype legislation is not yet available. The issue of harmonization of legislation by Ecowas countries needs to be addressed as a priority matter.

Sub Regional & International Cooperation

Ghana has participated in international SALW initiatives. Notably Ghana has been involved in the ‘Biting the bullet consultative group process’ regarding the issue of arms transfers with particular focus on transfers to non-state actors. Ghana endorses the recommendations from that process that will be submitted to the UN for possible adoption. Ghana has also participated in other international fora for global implementation of arms control initiatives including the development of West African and international arms control seminar & the Arms Trade Treaty initiative as well as consultative processes for the Adoption of ‘ECOSAP’ – Ecowas small arms program and networking meetings of Ecowas small arms commissions.

Challenges

In Ghana the issue of Small arms has been perceived as a classified national security subject matter. Implementation of the UNDP/ BCPR support program has consequently involved building trust to permeate a traditional sovereignty enclave of security agencies and to sensitize government on perceiving small arms as both a security and developmental issue.

The national commission needs to work on better collaboration with civil society for cohesive programmatic intervention in an arena iron clad with political sensitivity.
A program of effective small arms control is capital intensive and requires enormous governmental resources and concerted donor support.

We need ever increasing resources for the comprehensive phase of the program, which will link research with policy and targeted programmatic intervention to generate stakeholder buy-in. We shall advocate continued training to facilitate cohesive & synchronized operations for the security sector, mainstream gender and focus on youth groups. We shall pursue practical disarmament in northern Ghana as well as weapons for development and weapons free community’s concepts. We hope that the donor community will provide much needed support in crises prevention.

In this regard we should like to acknowledge the financial support of the UK government for the ongoing Ghana program and technical/financial support from UNDP, BCPR [SADU] unit & Safer Africa.

Way Forward:

We propose that the West African collective stem the alarming phenomena of small arms misuse, which is overwhelming us and burying our human resource in a small arms graveyard. We need to engage Preventive Strategies that address the root causes of insecurity by focusing on a variety of factors including addressing poverty, inequities, political exclusion & implementing good political, corporate and economic governance

CONCLUSION

Ghana cannot claim absolute success in the programs it has initiated so far. We do know however that a foundational inroad has been made in the fight against small arms proliferation by the implementation of the outlined activities
We imagine Peace and Security as a product to market; it is essential to poverty eradication and achievement of the millennium development goals. The reward is, not having development squandered. The fight against small arms is a fight for freedom in development. It connotes the actualization of democratic principles to which the government of Ghana is committed.

On UN weapons destruction day, Ghana had a burning inferno of arms in the process of destruction === A peace syndrome like an Olympic torch calling the world community to peaceful resolution of conflicts and to sanity.

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