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While El Salvador is one of the Central American countries most affected by the proliferation and abuse of small arms at present it is probably the one that has done the most to address the issue. Despite a UN-sponsored peace process that brought the FMLN guerrillas into the formal political arena along with thousands of military style weapons in their possession violence continues at alarming levels. The incompleteness of the post-conflict disarmament in combination with the conclusion of other wars in the region and the growth in drug trafficking have increased the profile of small arms and their consequences in the region. National newspapers such as *La Prensa Gráfica* and the *Diario de Hoy* have reported that more people are dying on average on a daily basis from armed violence than did during the twelve years of civil war.

Both government and civil society have taken action to halt this epidemic. The Salvadoran government has signed and ratified the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking of Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials while the legislature approved the new national law on arms and munitions (see below). Police have increased confiscation of illegally held weapons and have, arguably, improved their image under their new civilian mandate and modern methods of law enforcement such as community policing.

On the side of civil society, the Patriotic Movement Against Crime has continued the Goods for Guns program initiated in 1996 (see below). The Archdiocese of San Salvador's Human Right Office continues to document incidents involving grenade accidents and assaults (see below). In May 1999, the Central American University Institute for Public Opinion published a study on "Cultural Norms and Attitudes on Violence" that directly addressed the consequences of small arms on Salvadoran society.

While new imports, legal and illegal, contribute to the availability and visibility of small arms in the country it is generally recognized that even without the entry of new weaponry the existing stocks present significant problems. In addition to the arms introduced by the FMLN guerrillas during the period of conflict the US government made large transfers of military small arms and light weapons as noted in the table below. Many of these weapons such as the M16A1 rifle and M67 fragmentation hand grenades are commonly reported as the instruments of organized criminal activity, in addition to the AK-47, a weapon often associated with the FMLN guerrillas.

***US Foreign Military Sales/Deliveries of Light Weapons to El Salvador (1980-1993)***

<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Colt 45 pistol	225
M16A1 5.56 mm rifle	32,374
M1D .30 caliber sniper rifle	189
M203 40 mm grenade launcher	1,413
M79 40mm grenade launcher	1,704
M14 hand grenade	1,007
M67 fragmentation hand grenade	266,420

Source: Federation of American Scientists, Arms Sales Monitoring Project

According to *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1999-2000* the Armed Forces of El Salvador maintain the following small arms and light weapons in national stocks:

- 9 mm FN 35 pistol
- 9 mm N&K MP5 sub-machine gun
- 9 mm Uzi sub-machine gun
- 5.56 mm HK33 rifle
- 5.56 mm M16A1 rifle
- 5.5 mm Galil rifle
- 7.62 mm M14 rifle
- 7.62 mm G3 rifle
- 7.62 mm M60 machine gun
- 7.62 mm Madsen machine gun
- 7.62 mm FN MAG machine gun
- 00.30 Browning M1919A4 machine gun
- 0.50 Browning M2HB machine gun
- 40 mm M79 grenade launcher
- 40 mm M203 grenade launcher
- 60 mm M19 mortar
- 81 mm M29 mortar
- 120 mm UBM-52 mortar
- 90 mm RCL M67 anti-tank weapon
- 3.5 in RL M20 anti-tank weapon
- 75 mm RCL M20 anti-tank weapon

On January 8, 1999 the Salvadoran legislature ratified the OAS sponsored Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking of Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials. El Salvador was the tenth OAS Member State to ratify the treaty and demonstrate interest in regionalizing efforts to combat the illicit trade in firearms. The ratification was also seen as an influence in the passage of national legislation in the areas of arms possession and use and money laundering.

On July 2, 1999 the Salvadoran legislature approved a new law on arms, munitions, explosives and related materials. The new law establishes three types of firearms licenses, the right to possess a firearm, the right to carry a concealed weapon and the right to both. Individuals that already have a license will only be required to meet new regulations when their current one expires. The Ministry of Defense now administers an exam to all Salvadorans over the age of eighteen who wish to obtain a license.

The new law allows citizens to carry and use semi-automatic, but not automatic, rifles and carbines up to 11.6 mm. This for example, allows civilians to own an AR-15 rifle, but not the M-16 military version of the same. Under this law, penalties were established for any firearms producer or retailer who transforms a semi-automatic weapons into automatic fire without government authorization. Only the Salvadoran military is allowed to carry fully automatic weaponry and explosives.

The passage of the law was enabled due to the support of the ruling ARENA party. The FMLN, El Salvador's second largest political party, abstained from voting. The FMLN considers that rifles with a range of 200 to 300 meters are unnecessary for civilian self-defense and that a gun with a 50 meter range should suffice. Furthermore, they indicated that the use of high power weaponry by relatively untrained civilians is a public safety hazard. Proponents of the law argue that the legislation allows honest civilians to protect themselves against well-armed criminals.

In 1996 a group of business leaders known as the Patriotic Movement Against Crime (MPCD) got together with the Rotary Club of El Salvador and the Catholic Church to start a voluntary weapons collection program where civilians turned in weapons in exchange for vouchers for supermarkets, shoe stores and pharmacies. This program became known as "Goods for Guns" and has been implemented on twenty-three weekends through mid-1999. The Ministry of Defense and Civilian National Police provide supporting roles in receiving and destroying the weapons collected, as well as storing their remnants before they are integrated into a peace monument. As of June 1999 the MPCD had collected the following types of weapons:

***Weapons Collected by MPCD 1996-99***

Pistols and short arms	1,354
Long arms including assault rifles	3,043
Grenades	3,180
Grenade launchers	44
Law Rockets	290
Detonator cord	84
Detonators	1,042
Blocks of TNT	277
C-4 explosive	147
Mines	55
Mortars	4
RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenades	6
SAM-7 surface-to-air missiles	1

<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>9,527</b>
Magazines	3,157
Ammunition	129,696
<b>Total</b>	<b>142,380</b>

Source: MPCD

The more than three thousand grenades turned in voluntarily to the MPCD demonstrate the diffusion these weapons have had in Salvadoran society. Unofficial sources say the black market price for fragmentation hand grenades ranges from US\$1-10. These weapons are used deliberately by organized criminals, youth gangs, mischievous high school students and are occasionally stumbled upon by young children. Between September 1, 1998 and July 29, 1999 the Archdiocese of San Salvador's Office for Human Rights investigated and reported on 40 cases involving hand grenades, resulting in the death of 28 individuals and the serious injury of 87 others. The majority of these incidents took place in the capital city of San Salvador and the neighboring region of La Libertad, twenty-four related to youth gang activity.

Official United States government transfers can be held responsible in part for the old stocks in circulation within the region. However, since the end of the conflict US government transfers to Salvadoran government institutions have dropped considerably as evidenced in the table below:

***United States Small Arms Exports/Transfers to El Salvador  
Government to Government Transfers (1996-1997) in thousands of US Dollars***

<b>Item</b>	<b>1997 Quantity</b>	<b>1997 Value</b>	<b>1996 Quantity</b>	<b>1996 Value</b>
Cartridges up thru 22 mm	Not specified	\$9	Not specified	\$15
Machine guns	Not specified	\$1	13	\$57
Other weapons up to 75 mm	*	*	1	\$9
Total	*	\$10	*	\$81

Source: Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers: Database of Small Arms Production and Transfers

The continued legal trade in small arms and the illicit trade in existing stocks has added to the total number of weapons in circulation. The three tables below reflect the magnitude of the legal commercial arms trade in El Salvador.

***Commercial Licenses Granted to US Dealers for export to El Salvador (1996-1998) in thousands of Us Dollars***

<b>Item</b>	<b>1998 Quantity</b>	<b>1998 Value</b>	<b>1997 Quantity</b>	<b>1997 Value</b>	<b>1996 Quantity</b>	<b>1996 Value</b>
Raw material	Not specified	\$147	Not specified	\$1,000	Not specified	\$332
Cartridges .22-.50	2,325,000	\$654	13,068,00	\$2,265	5,850,000	\$1,028

Pistols and revolvers	7,943	\$2,239	11,338	\$4,342	5,944,447	\$19
Pistol and revolver parts	Not specified	\$261	Not specified	\$61	Not specified	\$20
Non-military rifles	1,979	\$564	1,470	\$467	827	\$551
Rifle parts	Not specified	\$60,000	Not specified	\$68	Not specified	\$8
Carbines					30	\$18
Non-military shotguns					Not specified	\$1,552
Total		\$3,927		\$8,210		\$9,455

Source: Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers: Database of Small Arms Production and Transfers

***Legal Small Arms Imports to El Salvador (1995-1999\*)***

Item	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999*
Pistols	5,285	5,488	6,132	6,989	2,536
Revolvers	4,429	5,095	3,852	5,950	1,757
Shotguns	3,231	4,840	1,973	3,117	1,189
Rifles	839	1,063	633	1,431	362
Carbines	33	39	196	61	39
<b>Total Firearms</b>	<b>13,817</b>	<b>16,525</b>	<b>12,786</b>	<b>17,528</b>	<b>5,883</b>
Munitions	2,008,000	3,032,000	3,406,000	4,302,750	1,830,750

Source: Ministry of Defense of El Salvador

\*1999 figures up through 28 June 1999

***Materials Authorized for Import by the Salvadoran Ministry of Defense 1999\****

Item	Quantity
Pistols	17,741
Revolvers	7,991
Shotguns	8,110
Rifles	2,809
Carbines	202
Total firearms	36,853
Total munitions	11,656,700

Source: Ministry of Defense of El Salvador

Note: 32 companies authorized to import firearms in 1999

The new legal imports alone during the last several years more than offset the arms removed from society through UN disarmament, voluntary turn-in and police

confiscation. The police reported the decommissioning of 4,672 firearms in 1998 (*La Prensa Gráfica*, May 23, 1999). Many of the new firearms imported are for the expanding private security industry and common citizens. It is debatable whether or not these legally imported weapons add to the problem of small arms proliferation and misuse. The Ministry of Defense has registered 150,000 legally held firearms to date in a country that experiences an average of 500 armed assaults and 21 homicides on a daily basis. El Salvador is an example of a country that has taken significant steps on a variety of levels to confront small arms and their consequences but has not been able to make a visible impact in the short term.