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**CAN SECRET DEFENSE FUEL ARMS TRAFFICKING AND
WORSEN THE SECURITY CLIMATE IN THE ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES (ECCAS)?**

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In this policy brief, the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute assesses the recent developments around the issues of security and illicit arms trafficking in the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC). We hope this analysis contributes to address the issue of transnational organised crimes in terms of access to small arms and light weapons by non-state actors. Before providing some recommendations, it is crucial to firstly pay a close attention to illicit arms trafficking and the impact on the security situation within the ECCAS regions.

AN APPRAISAL OF THE SECURITY SITUATION WITHIN THE ECCAS REGIONS

According to the recent statistics released by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Central Africa office, there are more than 10 million weapons out of control in circulation within the sub-region of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). This represents 10% of the estimated 100 million of weapons in circulation across the African continent. The ECCAS member states include Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of



Congo, Sao Tome-et Principe, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Rwanda. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) constitute the main items of this illicit arms trafficking which have a serious impact on the security across the sub-region.

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Between 10-13 June 2018, the first convention for the control of arms was held in Yaounde, Cameroon. The theme of the work was **“the access of non-state actors to small arms and light weapons: a threat to the peace and security of the States of Africa Central.”** During this conference, it appeared that Armed violence resulting from the proliferation of small arms has led to the death of nearly 15,000 people in Central Africa over the past decade. The representative of ECCAS Secretary General, Savihenda Daniel Raimundo observed that the spread



of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Central Africa is at the origin of several crises recorded in the sub-region. He went on to argue that the ease with which non-state actors access weapons lead to the institutions being weakened and their collapse often inevitable. The democratic process is undermined, and anarchy is erected in order. During this conference Ivor Richard the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres delivered a message calling for states to strengthen control circulation of arms in the sub region.

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The fact that more than half of the countries in the ECCAS region are caught into prolonged conflicts, terrorist attacks and tribal wars whereas the other half seems to enjoy a precarious peace should be a matter of serious concerns. In fact, the African continent has been turned into a



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battle ground, for it is involved in more major armed conflicts than any other place on the planet. In his introductory remarks during a UN session of the Security Council held in 13 May 2015, the then Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, introducing his latest report observed that the widespread availability of weapons was a major factor in the over 250 conflicts of the past decade, leading to more than 50,000 deaths each year and record levels of displacement.

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The unspeakable violence perpetrated by the extremist group Boko Haram in Cameroon, Chad (Niger, Nigeria), the unstable political situation in Burundi, the ongoing conflict in the Central Africa Republic, the recent attempted coup d'état in Equatorial Guinea and political unrests in Gabon, the prolong conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo have resulted in



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thousands of fatalities, injuries, displaced people and refugees, poverty and sorrow.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS ARE THE MAIN TOOLS TO SPREAD VIOLENCE WITHIN THE ECCAS REGION.

The trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) plays a key role in generating this amount of atrocities. The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons remains a serious transnational organised crime fuelling violence in the ECCAS region. During the above-mentioned session of the UN Security Council, the then High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein emphasised the multiplicity of damages caused by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. As he argues 'small arms do not only make easy the taking and maiming of lives, but also kill economies and the social bonds on which every kind of collective institution and progress rely'.



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THE MAIN REASON BEHIND THE PROLIFERATION OF ILLICIT ARMS TRAFFICKING IN THE ECCAS REGION: MEMBER STATES ARE NOT WILLING TO SHARE INFORMATION REGARDING THEIR ARMS STOCKS, IMPORTS, CITING SECRET DEFENSE

The illicit arms trafficking in the ECCAS region is fuelled by the fact that its member states failed to comply with the treaty on arms trade adopted by the United Nations in 2006 and the 2011 Kinshasa convention on the prohibition of illicit arms. Indeed, following the sustained among of violence and insecurities produced by the genocides in Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, the wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central Africa Republic and Somalia, the United Nations and other stakeholders undertook to strictly regulate and control activities surrounding small arms and light weapons (SALW). It is within such a context that the United Nations Convention on armed trade and the Kinshasa Convention on the prohibition of illicit arms came into being respectively in 2006 and 2011. Unfortunately, these agreements did not bring an end to the lucrative business of illicit arms trafficking despite the



alarming consequences of such a trafficking on human rights and human security.

Member states do not comply with the treaty on arms trade adopted by the United Nations in 2006 and the 2011 Kinshasa Convention on the Prohibition of illicit arms.

In addition to the non-compliance with international agreements to control and proscribe illicit arms trafficking, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Central Africa office, further observed that member states of the ECCAS are not willing to share information regarding their arms imports, citing secret defense. The concept of secret defense is a vague one linked to the idea of national security. This means that to protect itself from any internal or external threat (real or alleged) a state based on its sovereign character can willingly choose not to comply with its international commitments towards state and non-state actors.



The idea of secret defense is also about the balance between the security of the state and freedom of its inhabitants. Yet for one reason or another we live in an era where owing to the recrudescence of terrorism, spying activities, growing suspicions and mistrust among one another, everything and even nothing can become a matter of national security and secret defence. Every state has a legitimate right to acquire weapons for security purpose across its territory. But most of the time, owing to corruption and poor leadership, it is these same weapons that end up without the hands of criminal networks who are not entitled to them.

Except the secret defence argument submitted by member states of the sub-region, it should be noted that another element fuelling the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons within the ECCAS region is the fact that member states have their own interpretation of the Kinshasa Convention and the UN treaty on arms trade. The issue of interpretation of laws and treaties has always been a delicate issue which generate more problems than solutions.



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Another factor facilitating the illicit trafficking of arms in the sub-region is the porous borders which are poorly monitored and controlled and sometimes lack basic infrastructures and logistics. This phenomenon is strengthened owing to the transnational character of the traffic. This means that the chain is most of the time complex, heterogenous and hard to monitor, for several people are involved including state officials, law enforcement agencies, criminal networks and the end users. Added to this, Small arms and light weapons are easy to transport and move around with and people going through unequipped borders easily move around with such weapons.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective and sustainable solution to the issue of arms trafficking within the ECCAS region require a holistic approach.

‘Deny access to illegal weapons and ammunition, and you deny criminals, armed groups and extremists a central means to perpetrate violence intimidation and harm’.

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons across the region needs to be curb. To do so, it is important that member states of the ECCAS as well as every nation on the planet strive for a genuine implementation of the UN Treaty on Arms Trade and the Kinshasa Convention on the Prohibition of Illicit Arms. This might result in serious financial lost for some multinational involved in the manufacturing of these deadly materials, but it is a concerted effort, that need to be done to save lives and achieve peace. Criminal networks are not only constituted by



criminals per say. It is a complex chain made up of some manufacturers, arm dealers, state officials and end users.

The second suggestion is that no peace can be achieved if good governance, democracy and the rule of law remain ignored as it is the case in several countries within the sub-region. Governments involved in corruption and embezzlement of public funds distract enormous resources that could help their population. Leaders who in some instances behave as dealers expose themselves and their country to violent crisis. Time has come to understand that people sometimes resort to violence not because they are inherently violent, but because they see it as an expression of frustrations owing to injustices, inequalities and marginalisation. It is in this sense that violence sometimes confront power and attempt to use its energy against the society. Children, men or women who are busy at school, university or at work will hardly end up being involved in terrorist activities or armed rebellion.

At the country level, the possession of guns can be regulated. A list gun points stores can be setup and weapons, ammunitions and related materials can be licensed, confiscated, controlled and prohibited when necessary. The borders of states should be equipped with scanners and



other related technologies to detect arms. As observed by Ban Ki-moon ‘deny access to illegal weapons and ammunition, and you deny criminals, armed groups and extremists a central means to perpetrate violence intimidation and harm.’

This is a need of strategy to raising awareness around the issue of arms trafficking across the continent. The African Union initiative regarding the Africa Amnesty Month for the Surrender and Collection of Illicit Weapons initiated in September 2017 should be praised, encouraged and implemented by states every year. A concerted effort is necessary not only at the global and regional level but also at the sub-regional level to curb arms trafficking. During the first conference on the control of small arms and light weapons held in Yaounde, the country has subscribed to the setting up of a legal device regulating all activities related to weapons. Such initiatives if taken seriously can inspire more genuine and sustainable solutions not only to the issue of access to small arms and light weapons by non-state actors but to the broad phenomenon of transnational organised crimes.



About the author:

Gerard Emmanuel Kamdem Kamga was trained in law and political science, human rights, critical theory, security and gender analysis. Holding a doctoral degree in laws with focus on emergency regimes from the University of Pretoria, he has over the years, developed a sound expertise in emergency and security issues. Gerard is the Executive Director of the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute.