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## **The Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Indigene-Settler Conflict in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria (2000-2012)**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the impact of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) proliferation on the indigene–settler conflict in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria, between 2000 and 2012. It argues that the circulation of illicit arms intensified the frequency and lethality of violence, particularly within the ethno-religious dynamics that set indigenous groups against Hausa/Fulani settlers. Using [insert methodology, e.g., qualitative interviews, archival analysis, or conflict event data], the study finds that weak security institutions, insufficient political will, and the partisan role of security agencies facilitated arms availability and conflict escalation. The research concludes that unless Nigeria's security apparatus is comprehensively restructured to regulate arms possession and prosecute offenders, the cycle of violence is likely to persist.*

**Keywords:** Small Arms, Light Weapons, Proliferation, Indigene-Settler and Plateau North.

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## **Introduction**

The transition to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999 coincided with a marked increase in violent conflict across the country. While multiple factors, including ethnicity, religion, and politics, contributed to this escalation, the emergence of non-state armed actors and illicit arms traffickers significantly intensified the level of violence in both rural communities and urban centres. In Northern Nigeria, which has experienced recurrent episodes of large-scale violence, the introduction of Sharia law further polarised the region along ethno-religious lines. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) quickly became one of the most worrying aspects of these conflicts, contributing to high casualty rates and undermining peace and security efforts.

The widespread availability of SALWs not only resulted in loss of life and large-scale displacement but also created an enabling environment for insurgents, terrorists, militants, and criminal networks to thrive. Conflicts that might have remained at the level of protests or localised grievances escalated into organised crime and large-scale violence. This trajectory reflected the fragility of the Nigerian state, particularly the government's failure to deliver on its social contract of protecting citizens and ensuring security.

The dynamics of SALWs proliferation in Nigeria cannot be understood in isolation from broader regional and international trends. The end of the Cold War in 1989 was accompanied by the emergence of warlords, ethnic militias, and insurgencies across many African countries, shifting the nature of conflict from interstate wars to predominantly intrastate confrontations. This transition was characterised by irregular warfare and the widespread use of SALWs, which flooded fragile states across the continent. As Laurence Edward (1998) observed, the influx of light weapons exacerbated intrastate conflicts and heightened the risk of mass violence.<sup>1</sup> In recognition of these dangers, the United Nations Millennium Report (2000) highlighted the proliferation of SALWs as a pressing global security concern, with Secretary-General Kofi Annan underscoring the urgent need to stem the flow of such weapons. Commenting on this, he said;

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<sup>1</sup> Laurence Edward. "Light Weapons and Intrastate Conflict: Early Warning Factors and Preventive Action", *Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict*, (Washington DC, 1998). pp 4 -5

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The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems – and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of carnage they cause, small arms could well be described as “weapons of mass destruction” .... Small arms destruction is not merely a security issue; it is also an issue of human rights and of development. The proliferation of small arms sustains and exacerbates arms conflicts. It endangers peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian laws. It threatens legitimate but weak government, and it benefits terrorists as well as perpetrators of organised crime.<sup>2</sup>

The arbitrary use of small arms and light weapons resulted in a high rate of criminality among the various ethnic groups, as well as the surge of the non-state actors in Plateau North and the state. The negative impact on the environment was the socio-economic difficulties, and despite government investment in conflict resolution and peacebuilding between warring communities, the movement of armed men into the area who massacred innocent people and destroyed properties continued exponentially.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the impacts of SALWs in the indigene–settler conflict in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria, between 2000 and 2012. By focusing on this localised conflict within its broader national and international context, the paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of how arms proliferation exacerbates ethno-religious violence and undermines peacebuilding efforts.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Small arms and light weapons covered a wide range of weapons and ammunitions. According to the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, ammunition and other Related Materials of 2006<sup>3</sup>, SALWs were divided into:

**Small Arms:** These were arms made for personal use, and they included, among others, firearms and ammunition such as bombs (exploding gas, grenades and rocket

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<sup>2</sup> Kofi Anan. *We the People: The Role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Geneva, United Nations, 2000). pp 52-53. Available at [www.un.org/millennium/sg/report/full.htm](http://www.un.org/millennium/sg/report/full.htm). Accessed 20/07/2024.

<sup>3</sup> See ECOWAS Convention on Small arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials, (14 June, 2006). pp. 4-9. Available at [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org). Accessed 20/07/2024.

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launchers), missiles and mines. It also included revolvers, pistols, rifles and machine guns.<sup>4</sup>

### **Light Weapons**

Light weapons were firearms such as heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, anti-craft cannons (including anti-tank cannons), portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers, anti-aircraft missile launchers and mortars that moved for at least 100 millimetres, with cartridges, munitions for small-calibre weapons, projectiles and missiles for small arms, and mobile containers with missiles or projectiles for anti-aircraft or anti-tank simple action systems.<sup>5</sup>

### **Other Related Materials**

This included all the components, parts or spare parts for small arms and light weapons that were useful. Other related materials of SALW included clubs, knives and machetes to weapons below the *United Nations Register of Conventional Arms*, those categorised as small arms and light weapons as defined in the international instruments with special attributes that made them useful during irregular warfare and attacks. These were arms and weapons which caused fewer casualties during attacks and were less expensive but killed, simple to use, durable, portable, easy to be carried about and hidden from public view except when brought out, and used by the civilians and security agencies. They were used for self-defence and the security of the environment; they were misused by the security agents and non-state actors depending on the situation to perpetuate violence in the society.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Intra-State Dimension of Small Arms and Light Weapons**

The 1990s marked the beginning of intense intra-state conflicts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where scenes of one or more armed conflicts with at least 175 sub-national groups and organisations resorted to acts of violence ranging from random

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid*

<sup>5</sup>*ibid*

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly Panel of Governmental Expert on Small Arms, (August, 1997). pp. 11-12.

Available at [www.peacebuilding.org](http://www.peacebuilding.org). Accessed 12/06/2023; Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). Small Arms: The Real Weapons of Mass Destruction, (May, 2006). Available at [www.archive.globalpolicy.org](http://www.archive.globalpolicy.org)... Accessed 20/07/2024.

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incidences of criminality to full-blown insurgency. Most of these conflicts, unlike the interstate conflicts, were not aimed at undermining the credibility of the state.<sup>7</sup> The political dimension of intrastate conflict came in four categories:

- i. Random acts of violence by individuals or groups having no aspiration to the status of a state, e.g., criminality among rival gangs or organised criminal acts against persons in positions of authority, such as judges and police officers.
- ii. Sporadic incidence of violence by organised groups seeking greater political participation, cultural autonomy, and economic benefit within the existing state structure.
- iii. Sustained resort to violence over a long period of time by organisations and movements with intent to supplant the existing governmental authority over all or parts of its territory.
- iv. Intense acts of extreme violence by groups operating within the context of the breakdown of the state in all parts of its territory.<sup>8</sup>

Armed conflicts that came with the use of small arms and light weapons were different from the interstate wars that existed before in the following ways--

- i. Unlike in the war fought by the armed forces, the maximum human casualties in intra-state conflict were the unarmed civilians, many of whom neither understood nor wanted to take part in the violence. Almost 90% of deaths in intra-conflicts in the 1990s were non-participating civilians.
- ii. Unlike in the inter-conflicts, where the more powerful, organised military had the chance of ending the war in victory, in the intra-state conflicts, there was no guarantee of winning. In some of the internal conflicts in Africa, the most heavily armed groups did not win, e.g., Rwanda between the Hutus and Tutsis.<sup>9</sup>
- iii. Like in interstate conflicts, intrastate conflicts were also for the purpose of control of government of territory. This involved recurrent clashes of interest

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<sup>7</sup> See Report on Armed Conflict in the World, 1989-93, Swadesh Rana, "Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts", Research Paper, *UN Institute for Disarmament Research*, No. 934. (Geneva, March, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See Simpson John Contribution in the Research Workshop on Small Arms and Intra-state Conflicts in the *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

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over values, relationships and identities, e.g., the conflict in Jos Plateau and its environs, which was for the control of the political space in Jos and other parts of Plateau North. What started as an internal conflict within by one or two persons led to general armed conflicts in the zone.

- vi. Irrespective of their historical origins, most intra-conflict presently had its origin from the migration of people who wanted political space, recognition and greener pastures.<sup>10</sup> In Jos Plateau, the Hausa/Fulani migrated to the place, with a large population seeking recognition as indigenes of the place and were resisted by the indigenous groups.

The majority of intrastate conflicts involved close-range combat, irregular fighters, a lack of clearly defined military objectives and a pre-set time frame for accomplishment. It did not require much logistical support, training or maintenance. Small arms were the weapons of choice in internal conflicts where the average age of the fighters was relatively young.<sup>11</sup>

In Plateau North, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons was linked to most of the crises and killings between the indigenous ethnic groups and the Hausa/Fulani in the area and was fingered as the immediate cause(s) of armed conflict in Plateau State. Agreed, it didn't cause the conflicts, but its usage and application during crises prolonged and made the crises more intense and intractable. The intractability of the conflict in turn led to the acquisitions of more arms and weapons and the importation of mercenaries, which made the violence lethal. The use of SALW in the conflicts led to an increase in the number of casualties, deaths and other destruction in the environment.

Numbers of deaths caused by the use of small arms and light weapons were monumental, as they also caused diseases, starvation and displacement in the affected communities, including socio-economic problems like unemployment and hunger, which in turn led to underdevelopment. The trauma caused by the misuse of SALWs by the security personnel and non-state actors who killed innocent citizens and colleagues and domestic violence was very visible in the area. The weapon gave the holder the power to coerce victims into kidnapping, rape, armed robbery and militancy. Apart from the massive deaths caused by the use of firearms, businesses

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

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and investments were disrupted and destroyed in different parts of the area and state, and the result was the withdrawal of businesses in Jos metropolis and in other parts of the state.<sup>12</sup> Another notable effect of the arbitrary use of small arms was the human rights abuse, as they made citizens live in constant fear and deprivation of the right to peaceful protest, assembly (even for religious purposes), movement and loss of properties to armed hoodlums.<sup>13</sup>

### **Methodology**

The study adopts the narrative and descriptive method of data analysis in profiling the negative effects of small arms and light weapons in the Plateau North conflicts. The paper critically analysed how the proliferation of these arms and weapons has prolonged the conflicts, thereby impacting negatively on the peace and development of the zone and Plateau State in general, using relevant books, journal articles and reports. Using content analysis, the paper sourced for opinions from respondents on the impact and solution to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the state.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts the human needs theory to explain how the use of small arms and light weapons increased the tempo of conflict in Plateau North. The theory was quite similar to that of frustration-aggression and relative deprivation theories. Its main assumption was that all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfil and that the denial or frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could result in conflict. Basic human needs in this context comprise physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs, and denying one or a group access to food and belongingness made them resort to violence in an attempt to have these basic needs.

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<sup>12</sup> Helen Chuma Okoro. "Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Legal Implication", *Nigerian Institute of Advance Legal Studies*, (2011). Available at [www.nairametrics.com>legal...](http://www.nairametrics.com>legal...) Accessed 20/07/2024.

<sup>13</sup> See the *International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)* adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on 23 December, 1966, which came into effect on 23 March, 1976.

The Covenant gave further impetus to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int). Accessed 20/07/2024.

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Maslow, in his “Motivation and Personality”, identified physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualisation. Burton listed “response stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, meaning, the need to appear rational and develop rationality, the need for a sense of control and the need for self-defence”. Azer named some basic needs like “security, distinctiveness, identity, social recognition of identity and effective participation in the process that shapes identities”.

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Holistically, it was the absence of equal participation, economic opportunities, poverty and injustices that was at the root of the conflicts in the zone. Plateau North was always prone to conflict largely due to the indigene/settler and farmer/herder syndrome that favoured or marginalised some groups on the basis of their identity. It encouraged a keen competition among various ethnic and religious groups over available scarce resources in the zone.

## **Cases of Armed Conflicts in Plateau North**

### **The 2001 Jos Crisis**

On 7 September, 2001, the city of Jos witnessed the first major ethno-religious conflict in history. An antecedent to this crisis was the appointment of Alhaji Muktar Mohammed, a Hausa/Fulani settler, as the Poverty Eradication Coordinator for Jos North a week before the crisis. The appointment sparked violent protest by the indigenes, where threats and counter-threats were issued from both sides. The immediate causes were the issuance of ‘resident certificates’ rather than ‘indigene certificates’ to the Hausa/Fulani in Jos. Over 1000 people were killed, and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Eto Baba PDP Ward Congress Crisis of 2002**

The crisis began in the Eto Baba community in Jos North Local Government Area as a result of an attempt by the Hausa/Fulani to influence the result of the PDP ward congress in favour of their candidates. Sensing the manipulation by the Hausa/Fulani

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<sup>14</sup>Abraham Maslow. *Motivation and Personality*, (New York, Macmillan Press, 1970); John Burton. *Deviance, Terrorism and War: The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems*, (London, Macmillan Press, 1979). p.2; Edward Azar. *Protracted International Conflicts*, (London, Prager Publishers, 1994). p.14

<sup>15</sup>Funmi Josephine Para-Mallam. “Introduction to Finding Durable Peace on the Plateau”, *Peace and Security Research, Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies*, Jos, (2012).

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settlers, the indigenes confronted them. Before order was restored, over one hundred lives were lost, mostly Hausa/Fulani, and properties were destroyed. The impact of this crisis was enormous, as it was felt politically, economically, socially, religiously and psychologically.<sup>16</sup>

### **The November 2008 Jos Crisis**

The crisis began as a result of the rejection of the result of the Jos North Local Government Area elections results. According to an eyewitness, the results of the election were being collated when the Muslims declared their candidate, Alhaji Aminu Baba, as the winner. When they realised that the PDP candidate, Timothy Buba, a Christian, who polled 92,907, would win instead of Aminu Baba of ANPP, who scored 72,890, they started holding nocturnal meetings and thereafter mounted roadblocks in Muslim-dominated areas of the Jos metropolis. Over 50 people, mostly women and children, were killed, and houses, churches, mosques, shops and properties were destroyed.<sup>17</sup>

### **The January, March and December 2010 Jos Crisis**

The 17th January, 2010 violence was the fallout of the 2008 crisis, where some Muslims relocated because their houses were burnt down in the Tudun Wada Christian-dominated area. In an attempt to return and build those houses, they were resisted by the Christian community in the area. In anger, they invaded a nearby ECWA church, where worshippers were killed. Over 300 lives were lost in the crisis before the intervention of security agencies in the state.<sup>18</sup>

The Dogo and Nahawa communities were located in Du district, where the former governor Jonal Jang comes from, in Jos South Local Government, and the crisis started as a result of the invasion of the communities in March 2010 by the Fulani militia, who attacked, killed, maimed and burnt down houses. They complained that their cows were stolen by the Christian youths from the area. At the end, over 300

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<sup>16</sup> Shedrack G. Best. *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State*, Nigeria, (Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 2007). pp. 76-79

<sup>17</sup> Torhemba Nom Ambe Uva, "Identity Politics and Jos Crisis: Evidence, Lessons of Good Governance", *African Journal of History and Culture* (AJHA), vol.2 (93), (April, 2010). pp. 42-52.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

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people, mostly women and children, were killed in the attack. Almost all the homes in those communities were burnt down.<sup>19</sup>

There was also the 2010 Christmas Eve bombing of some strategic locations in the state capital inhabited by the Christian community. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the bombing, complaining it was in retaliation for the killing of Muslims in Jos, Maiduguri, Bauchi and in other parts of Nigeria and even threatened to continue the bombing. Over 80 people were killed in the twin bombing, and over 200 persons were displaced.<sup>20</sup>

### **The 2012 Crisis**

The crisis took place in the Barkin-Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas. It began when Fulani militia/mercenaries from the Republics of Chad and Niger attacked several communities in the Local Government Areas. The attack, which lasted for several hours simultaneously in those villages in the night, left no fewer than 140 people dead.<sup>21</sup>

### **Factors that Encouraged Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) Proliferation in Plateau North**

This ranges from internal and external political and economic factors which made firearms very easy to access and carry.

**Cross-Border Smuggling:** Cross-border smuggling led to the influx of arms into Plateau North from other countries by the government, its agencies and non-state actors. Although the importation of arms by the government was for security purposes, some of the arms were diverted by the security personnel for their selfish reasons. There was an illicit flow of arms through the NortheastRegion (along the Lake Chad Basin) and NorthwestRegion into Plateau State. There were cases of vehicles that carried arms being intercepted by security agents in Jos and in other parts of the state during stop and search operations.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Newswatch. "Jos Erupt in Violence Again", (23 January, 2010). Available at [www.newswatchnigeria.com](http://www.newswatchnigeria.com). Accessed 12/05/2021.

<sup>20</sup>*ibid*

<sup>21</sup>*ibid*

<sup>22</sup>Mugu Zaka Bako. "Conflicts Entrepreneurs and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light-Weapons: Implications for Peace and Security in Jos and its Environs", in Audu Gambo,

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**Ineffectiveness of the Security Agencies:** The ineffectiveness of the security agents to guarantee internal security in and around Jos and other parts of the state made the purchase and use of SALWs very easy. This measure, they felt, helped them to protect themselves and their properties during crisis. This happened because there was a lack of confidence in the security agencies or the refusal and inability of the security agents to carry out their responsibilities effectively. They were severally accused of taking sides in the conflicts in Jos and in other parts of the state. The lack of confidence in the security agents made residents feel unsafe and therefore resort to self-help through the use of illicit/illegal arms for protection.<sup>23</sup> According to Best,

In Nigeria, we have failed to build togetherness and failed to build a nation out of national identity. It is forcing people back to primordial sentiment – ethnicity, religion, state, tribes, region and so forth. There are small arms and light weapons in the hands of people who cannot control them, and it is against the law. The introduction of small arms and light weapons is prolonging conflict and making it get out of control. For example, the conflict in Plateau State – you can agree with me that the security architecture is weak. Security agents in Nigeria are not interested in arresting and persecuting those carrying arms, perpetrators of conflict in the state; rather, they take sides. Our security agencies have failed to guarantee internal security in Plateau State and in Nigeria in general.<sup>24</sup>

**The Existence of Ethnic Militia:** The formation of ethnic militias in and around Jos made firearms easily accessible during violent clashes. It was alleged that accessing firearms was very easy through the militant arms of Jasawa, Berom, Anaguta and Afizere youths and JNIG in Jos and its environs, as they copied from the militants and bandits in the South-South and South East. It led to the increase in the demand for powerful and sophisticated weapons in Jos and the activities of gun runners in other

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Zubairu Dagona, Luka Dajahar and Henry Mang, *Issues on Ethnicity, Religion and Conflict in Nigeria*, Edited, (Jos, Centre for Conflict Management and Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Jos, 2014). pp. 149-150.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Shedrack. Gaya Best, 62 Years, Oral Interview, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Jos, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. 21/06/2023.

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parts of the state who supplied arms to the indigenous farmers and Fulani herdsmen who were always at loggerheads in the communities.<sup>25</sup>

**Setting Up of Illegal Weapon Factories:** The quest to make profit through dubious means led to militias and citizens in the state going all out to patronise these unlicensed gun manufacturers and traffickers. One of the suspects arrested during the September 2001 violence in Jos with arms and ammunition confessed to having purchased the weapons two years earlier while planning for the attack. Considering the attractive and profitable nature of the gun trafficking business, the conflicts in Jos and its environs made it a ready market to sell firearms. The use of firearms in the violent conflicts in Jos and its environs also led to a surge in the fabrication, production and patronage of locally produced guns, which became a cheap alternative during violent conflict. For instance, since the beginning of the conflicts in the zone, the security agencies in 2010 uncovered local arms fabrication factories in Barkin Ladi and Kuru in the Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on this, Aka averred:

In the past, our relationship with the Fulani in this village was cordial. We offered them land for grazing and farming and even looked after their properties whenever they travelled. They sometimes worked on our farms for wages and on other occasions volunteered their labour without payment. When they returned from their travels, there was no suspicion or conflict between us.

However, this situation changed dramatically in recent years. Armed Fulani groups attacked our community, killed some of our people, and seized portions of our land. Despite repeated peace meetings convened by the government, we were instructed merely to remain peaceful, while armed herders continued to carry guns openly, drive cattle into our farms, and destroy crops both during the day and at night. There have also been reports of sexual violence, including the molestation and rape of women and girls at gunpoint. Out of fear, many villagers can no longer access their

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<sup>25</sup>Bako. "Conflicts Entrepreneurs and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light-Weapons: Implications for Peace and Security in Jos and its Environs"

<sup>26</sup> Umar Gusau. "Jos-Bound Men with 27 Guns Arrested", *Daily Trust Newspaper*, (17 August, 2010).

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farms, and several families have been displaced after their houses were burnt. We have repeatedly appealed to the government for protection, but the attacks persist.”<sup>27</sup>

**Security Agents and Small Arms Racketeering:** Most of the illicit firearms that were in circulation during the violence in Plateau North and other parts of the state came through the leakages from the security agents/agencies, i.e., the armed forces, the police, the paramilitary, etc. Some were sourced from some retired security personnel, remnants from the amnesty returnees, etc. It was alleged that some security personnel were compromised by giving out arms to the group they supported during violent clashes to carry out their nefarious activities. There were reports of high-ranking security officers being arrested for supplying arms to armed robbers in Jos in 2008 and many other cases.<sup>28</sup>

#### **The Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Plateau North Conflict**

The impact of small arms and light weapons in the Plateau North conflict was very visible from the perspective of human lives lost in the conflict in the period under review. From 2001 to 2012, in all the clashes and attacks in Jos and the spillover in the rural communities in Plateau North, there were massive losses in human lives, destruction of properties and displacement of people. The injuries sustained during attacks maimed people forever; some were bedridden with broken limbs, blind eyes, etc. In some communities, the populations were greatly reduced due to human lives lost during armed attacks. As explained by Fwatshak,

The Fulani don't respect the farmers/indigenes anymore and have resorted to violence, sacking communities at will with the use of mercenaries from the far north. The problem is not conflict; it is crisis, with the Fulani always attacking the farmers. Have you ever heard of the unknown gunmen being caught or arrested any day? Yet they are terrorising the whole state, and nothing is done by the security agents. Right now, their atrocities are getting out of hand. Here on the Plateau, any community they sack, they occupy it, appoint their Sarkin (chief), and the painful thing is that they kill the youths and the young girls so that there will be no continuity in those families.

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<sup>27</sup> His Royal Highness Bra-Irigwe, Rev. Ronku Aka, 85, Oral interview, Paramount Ruler of Irigwe Kingdom and Acting President, Bassa Council of Chiefs and Emir, Miango, Bassa LGA, Plateau State. Nigeria. 04/09/2023

<sup>28</sup> Best. “*Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria*”, pp. 7-8

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Until the security agents begin to check the excessive use of firearms in this country, the so-called unknown gunmen will continue to terrorise us.<sup>29</sup>

Extrapolating more on this, Abok explained thus:

Between 2017 and 2019 there were three peace meetings, and each time we finished the meeting, they would attack our communities or destroy our farmlands. On one occasion after a peace meeting with them, my people went to the farms and met the Fulani herders with guns grazing in our farms, and before they could run away, they were overpowered, raped and killed. The government has not helped to stop the Fulani from killing our youths and women. You have seen how desolate and terrible this place looks because of the conflict, no development, and no progress. The activities of unknown gunmen have scared all those who want to settle here and do business, as they have gone back to Jos. We are suffering, and most of our people are in the IDP camp. We are begging the government to come to our aid.<sup>30</sup>

The possession of firearms did not cause death but there was the temptation to deploy it excessively in conflict situations leading to human rights abuse.

Second was the arbitrary use of small arms, which prolonged the conflict in Jos and other parts of Plateau State. It led to the temptation to commit crimes such as robbery, rape, kidnapping, etc., thereby accentuating the rate of crime in the area. The possession of firearms gave the possessor the moral/ego to carry out any evil intention; it contributed to the high rate of crimes and violence in the area and beyond. In a situation where there were no laws to check the excess of criminality, it led to a breakdown of law and order, thereby undermining the rule of law in the area.<sup>31</sup>

The third impact was that even among the security agents, it led to extrajudicial killings, as some of them were not properly trained on how to effectively use arms and ammunition. For example, most of the accidental discharges and stray bullets by the police personnel who were vested with internal security in the society led to extrajudicial killings in the society. This overbearing responsibility without the

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<sup>29</sup>Sati U. Fwatshak, 57 Years, Oral interview, University of Jos, Jos, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. 06/07/2023

<sup>30</sup>Izang Abok, Age: 85+ Years, Oral Interview, District Head of Fobur, Jos East Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. 31/07/2023.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch. "They Do Not Own This Place: Government Discrimination Against the Non-indigenes" in Nigeria, Vol. 18. No. 3 (A), (25 April, 2006). Available at [ww.hrw.org](http://ww.hrw.org). Accessed 21/08/2024.

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requisite training robbed citizens of the rights to a fair hearing, the rights to life and the dignity of the human person recognised under the Nigerian law.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, the violent use of firearms in conflict situations created a culture of fear and suspicion among the citizens, especially in the rural communities where the indigenous farmers and cattle herders were always at loggerheads. In communities where there were kidnappings, the residents, whether indigenous or settlers, lived in constant fear and suspicion. The Fulani resorted to living in the jungles, far away from the central community from where they perpetrated their heinous crime at night.<sup>33</sup>

### **Human Rights Violations**

Human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms inherent to every individual from birth until death, regardless of nationality, belief, or way of life. The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) by both state and non-state actors in Nigeria has undermined these rights. The widespread threat and use of firearms during demonstrations, communal clashes, and terrorist attacks deprived citizens of their rights to life, security, and dignity.

In several conflicts, human rights violations were committed not only by armed militias, bandits, and insurgents but also by state security agencies. Methods employed to suppress civil disturbances often amounted to abuse, including extrajudicial killings euphemistically described as “accidental discharge” or attributed to “stray bullets”.<sup>34</sup>

### **Measures to Curb the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Plateau North**

The indigene–settler conflict in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the arbitrary use

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<sup>32</sup> See Section A of the Police Act, Cited in Helen Okoro. “Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Legal Implication”,

<sup>33</sup> Babayo Sule and Ibrahim Kawuley. “The Role of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Exacerbating Armed Groups Conflicts in Borno and Yobe States of North-eastern Nigeria, *International Academic Journal of Law*, Vol. 1. Issue 1. (2020). pp. 14-23.

<sup>34</sup> See the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN), World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), *Hope Betrayed? A Report Impunity and State Sponsored Violence in Nigeria*, (Lagos: CLEEN/OMCT, 2002), *ibid*.

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of SALWs. Several measures have been proposed and implemented at international, national, and local levels:

**Multilateral Frameworks:** Nigeria is a signatory to various international and regional agreements regulating SALWs. The United Nations Protocol on Small Arms, for instance, highlights the humanitarian and socio-economic consequences of uncontrolled arms flows and urges states to adopt “adequate laws, regulations, and administrative procedures to exercise effective control over the export, import, and transit of small arms” (UN Protocol, Article 11.2). Nigeria’s adherence to these obligations is essential for both peacebuilding and human rights protection.<sup>35</sup>

**Disarmament and Weapons-for-Development (WfD) Programmes:** Disarmament initiatives, such as the 2009 Niger Delta Amnesty, demonstrated that buy-back programmes coupled with rehabilitation packages (scholarships, vocational training, stipends) can yield significant arms recovery. Thousands of weapons were surrendered under that framework (Alimba, 2017). While Plateau North differs in context, adapting similar community-based disarmament and reintegration strategies could help reduce the circulation of illicit weapons.<sup>36</sup>

**Security Sector Reforms:** Effective control of cross-border arms smuggling requires strengthening border security, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and eliminating collusion between state agents and armed groups. Establishing a monitoring task force to oversee security personnel, particularly at borders and checkpoints, could reduce leakages and restore public confidence.

**Civil Society Engagement:** Civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and human rights groups play a vital role in arms control advocacy. Through research, awareness campaigns, and capacity-building workshops, these groups can help sensitise communities to the dangers of arms proliferation. Successful experiences from Mali, Liberia, and Sierra Leone illustrate the importance

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<sup>35</sup> See the UN Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons Prevention, Cited in Helen Okoro Available at [www.disarmament.unoda.org/salw](http://www.disarmament.unoda.org/salw). Accessed 20/07/2024

<sup>36</sup> Chinyere M. Alimba. “Controlling the Proliferation of Small Arms in Nigeria: Emerging Issues and Challenges”, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5. No. 10, (November, 2017). pp. 40-51.

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of grassroots education in reducing the demand for arms. Strengthening partnerships between state institutions and CSOs in Plateau North would support long-term peacebuilding.<sup>37</sup>

These measures highlight the need for a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach that integrates international commitments, national reforms, and community-based initiatives to stem the tide of SALWs proliferation in Plateau North and beyond.

### **Conclusion**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) has played a decisive role in intensifying and prolonging violent clashes in Plateau North, contributing to high casualty rates, widespread displacement, the destruction of property, and the long-term underdevelopment of the region. In these conflicts, the ready availability of arms enabled arbitrary violence and amplified the capacity of both state and non-state actors to commit human rights violations. The cumulative effect has been the erosion of social cohesion, the disruption of livelihoods, and the weakening of prospects for sustainable peace.

The responsibility for protecting lives and property lies with the Nigerian state as part of its social contract with citizens. Security agencies are legally and morally obligated not only to prevent and prosecute unlawful killings but also to regulate and control the use of firearms in society. Yet weak institutions, politicised security structures, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms have allowed arms proliferation to persist.

Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach. While central government reforms of the security sector are essential, they must be complemented by effective border control, accountability mechanisms for security agencies, robust disarmament and reintegration initiatives, and the active engagement of civil society organisations. Only through such a multi-stakeholder strategy can Nigeria begin to curtail the proliferation of SALWs, reduce armed violence, and restore peace and stability in Plateau State and across the nation.

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

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