

Small Arms Proliferation: Impact to Peace and Security

Jennifer S. Oreta*

Good morning. I am a faculty member of the Department of Political Science and also the outgoing convenor of the group called Philippine Action Network on Small Arms, or PhilANSA. It is a local group of the International Action Network on Small Arms, a group that advocates stricter gun control and a group that advocates an international arms trade treaty. Now my purpose in this conference is to bring in the discussion another dimension of peace and security, which is small arms. There is also a subject in the University for Peace, which I will handle, so this presentation that I will be doing today is just a parcel of the course, and also part of a bigger research that I am doing on general security.

Let me start off by defining what small arms is, and let me say at this point that I will be using the terms small arms, guns, and firearms interchangeably. Now the key feature of small arms or guns is that it uses an explosion in order to throw a projectile; in other words, it uses gun powder, so regardless of the shape, regardless of how it appears, for as long as you use an explosive in order to have a projectile, then it is considered a gun. So if you buy the local version of a *paltik*, *sumpak*, and in some communities in Northern Luzon, you have what we call the *wampong*, which they use for hunting, these are all categorized as guns.

Now the issue of small arms is a major dilemma, it is now a major global problem. In the last 2007 small arms survey, the figures they gave is that there are now about 875 million arms in circulation in the world. Of this number, about 650 million are in the hands of civilians. So that is roughly

* Jennifer Santiago Oreta is a faculty member of the Department of Political Science of the Ateneo de Manila University. She has successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation in April 2009 and currently awaits formal conferment of her degree. Her dissertation research links women's perception of security with gun proliferation. She is the outgoing convenor of the *Philippine Action Network on Small Arms* (PhilANSA), a network of organizations that advocate for (a) more regulation and control of firearms in the Philippines, and (b) the passage of an international Arms Trade Treaty to help regulate the transfer of arms among states. She is a member of the *Pax Christi International-Pilipinas* Section, a peace organization involved in advocacy, research, and peace education. She sits as Board member of the *International Peace Research Association Foundation* (IPRAF). She is also the convenor of the Youth Commission, and co-convenor of the Gender and Peace Commission, both of the *International Peace Research Association* (IPRA).

about 70% to 75% in the hands of civilians. In the Philippines, the statistics are very much the same. We have right now in 2008 about one million guns in circulation in the Philippines, and of this number, about 70% are in the hands of civilians, which means only 30% of the guns in circulation — legal guns in circulation, that is — are in the hands of the police, the military, and the deputized government officials. So if you have 70% of arms in circulation in the hands of civilians, it not only creates possibilities of peace and security issues, but it can also exacerbate the existing peace process, as well as the existing insurgency problem.¹

So far the data in 2006 is that there are about 500 to 700 non-conflict related deaths in the world each day. In 2008, the figures are even worse. There are about 1,000 non-conflict related deaths that happen in the world each day.

As I have mentioned, there are several sources of guns in circulation. First you have the legal manufacturers. In the Philippines, there are only about 45 legal manufacturers, but guess how many are the illegal manufacturers? In 1998 the figure of the Philippine National Police (PNP) was 5,000. 5,000 illegal manufacturers, and most of them are in Danao. Danao is a 40-minute drive from Cebu proper somewhere in Visayas, for the information of those who are not from the Philippines. So in August of 2008 I went to Danao and I had a meeting with the gunsmith cooperative. Now before I met with the gunsmith, I went first to the Office of the Mayor, assistant to the mayor specifically, and I asked him point blank “Do all people here in Danao have guns?” and he was also very candid, he said “Yes, that’s the reason why there are no bullets in Danao, that’s also probably why our criminal rate is very low because of the theory of deterrence. People know that people can get back at them whenever they try to bully another.” So when I asked the members of the cooperative, the gunsmith cooperative, the same question “Are there guns or do people here in Danao have guns?” All of them unanimously almost all at the same time said “No, we do not have guns, the gunsmiths sell all the guns that they manufacture at home.” So who do you believe? On one hand you have a government official candidly admitting that yes, we have guns here and then you have the gunsmith saying that no, we do not have guns, and the people in the community who manufacture guns in their backyard, they do this in

1. Professor Oreta prepared a short video showing how rampant, and how the small arms trade actually impacts not only the people themselves but also the security dilemma of the people. The raw footage showed farmers in La Castella in Negros Occidental attempting to barricade themselves against the landowners, who were also claiming the land. The landowners had some of their private army present and then they fired a warning shot. Succeeding shots were pointed in the direction of the farmers. These were no longer warning shots.

between their farming and fishing. The official figures, as I have said is 45 legal manufacturers, as opposed to 5,000 illegal arms manufacturers, so you can just imagine the number of guns really in circulation.

As I mentioned earlier, there are one million official legal guns based on the PNP data. But based on the small arms survey data, we have about 3.9 million guns in circulation in the country. So 2.9 million is quite a big number to overlook. 3.9 million, based on an NGO study, as opposed to the one million based on a government study.

May I just point out that in 2005 there was an executive order signed by President Arroyo lifting the foreign investment restriction on small arms, so the government really wanted the Philippines to be the next firearms capital probably in Asia.

Other sources of guns in circulation are external sources, such as aids or donations, or purchases for the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines; the crossing over of legal arms to illegal ones through theft, ambushes, and graft and corruption; and improvised guns, such as the *sumpak*, *paltik*, and *wampong*. By the way, the number of guns on the legal and illegal gun manufacturers is the official figure from the PNP, and they do not have an exact estimate in conflict areas. You will see here on the table the estimates based on different sources; I had to look for different sources in order to get these figures.

GROUP	ESTIMATE MEMBERS	WEAPONS HOLDINGS
MILF	(1998) 13,459	(1998) 10,227
	(2007) 11,769	(2007) 7,747
CPP-NPA	(1998) 1,148	(1998) 386
	(2002) 9,388	(2002) 6,149
ASG	(2007) 383	

Note that in the MILF, sometime in 1998 to 2007 there is a sudden drop, but if you notice the CPP-NPA, the Communist Party of the Philippines, from 1998, they only had a weapons holding of 386, but there is a leap or great increase from 1998 to 2002. Now, during the time of the dictator Marcos in the Philippines, they say that Marcos was the number one recruiter of the Communist Party of the Philippines, so it seems that he is now being replaced with that title. There was a controversial report in 1999 alleging that the MILF already has the capability of producing high-powered guns and ammunition. Of course this is being denied by the MILF, but it was a controversial report in 1999.

Now I did some interviews as I have mentioned, as a part of a larger study, and I asked the people on the ground if indeed gun availability is widespread, and it is. Very common among the interviews and the surveys that I have conducted is the statement that if you have the right connections and money, you can purchase a gun. In Nueva Ecija, you can rent a gun for

Php 5,000. So if you want to kill somebody but you do not want to purchase your own gun, you can rent it for Php 5,000 and you buy a bullet: Php 20 for the double action and Php 12 for the “ordinary.” So this is common knowledge, and they know this like the back of their hand. And if you will notice the distribution of gun owners, there are common areas: Cagayan de Oro, NCR, Cebu, Bohol, and the Cordilleras. Some of these areas are either very proximate to conflict or there is a very high crime incidence or they could probably still be a stronghold of the CPP-NPA. Now in the closely-knit communities there seems to be a very high level or perception of insecurity especially among the Chinese and the Muslims. Chinese because they feel they are being singled out by criminal groups, that is why they are being targeted for kidnap for ransom because they have money — that is their perception. The Muslims, they are insecure because of the long-standing conflict between the GRP, and the fundamentalists, and the ideological groups.

When asked what are the existing, or what are the groups which cause violence, the groups that were identified were youth gangs, criminals, neighbors, political families, private armed groups and private armies. Now this is indeed an interesting finding — there are two questions in my survey that corroborate each other: one is the perception of violence, where the question was “Is there violence in your community?” answered with a yes or no. Most of them said yes, that answer is high. But when I asked them to rate the level of violence, most of them rated the level of violence in the lower mark. So there seems to be a recognition of violence but the tolerance of the level of violence is wavering — it is constantly being negotiated and challenged. This can actually be a topic for further research.

Guns are perceived as an instrument of value, as opposed to the argument of those who are pro-guns, that guns are neutral, and it is up to the hands of the one holding the gun whether to use it for good or for bad. But in the surveys and in the interviews that I had conducted it is clear in the minds of the respondents that guns have a socially ascribed value, and that is protection and power.

I also asked “Who should be responsible for safety?” and majority of them said it is the individual, so most of them look at security as an individual, private affair. This has a lot to do or this has a lot of impact in terms of whether one should possess an instrument of security. That is probably the reason why you have a lot of civilians wanting to purchase guns if they have the means, precisely because they think that it is the responsibility of the individual to make his or her family secure. In traditional societies like the Muslims and the Aetas, they think that it is their responsibility to make the community secure, and probably that can also be the reason why some communities, especially in the Muslim areas, why they do everything in their power to defend the honor and welfare of their respective communities.

There is ambivalence in terms of gun ownership, they look at it as an instrument of protection and yet, they also recognize that it has dangers, that it is also a dangerous object.

This is also an interesting find. Among the Muslim women, they say, and this actually has given me a different perspective as regards gun ownership, they said that if we do not have guns, do you think the government will listen to us? We are marginalized in terms of power and we are minoritized in terms of number, the only reason why the government listens to us is because we have the capability of challenging the political authority of the state, so if we do not have guns, in their opinion, we will just be reduced to someone like the American Indians — they are seen, they are protected, but they are not heard. So it gives you a different angle on how guns are appreciated by different cultures and the different ways they perceive things.

Are they satisfied with state-security efforts? Majority of them are not satisfied, but a lot of them said that the *barangay* has a strong potential. This actually gives us a dilemma. On one hand, you can actually maximize or capitalize the *barangay* — *barangay* is the local government unit, the one closest to the people. So you can actually maximize their potential in terms of community policing, but how do we do that? Do we give them arms? If we do not give them arms, then what is the alternative way of imagining your community security?

Just a note on the police to population ratio; our police to population ratio right now is 1:900. The international standard is 1:500. The interesting part here is that of the 121,000 police that we have only 70% of them have guns. The rest only have their sticks. So if you are confronted with criminal elements with very highly sophisticated weapons, how can you address such a situation?

In the end, security is a core government responsibility necessary for economic and social development, and vital for the protection of human rights. It matters to the poor and other vulnerable groups, especially women and children, because bad policing, a weak justice system and a corrupt military mean that they suffer disproportionately from crime, insecurity, and fear.