

# UNODA OCCASIONAL PAPERS

NO. 25, DECEMBER 2013

## THE GUN-FREE ZONE—A TOOL TO PREVENT AND REDUCE ARMED VIOLENCE

BY SABRINA PFIFFNER AND HEATHER SUTTON

**UNODA**

United Nations Office for  
Disarmament Affairs



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United Nations

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gun-free zones are available from

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## Abstract

*Since we are gun free, we are no longer afraid to walk at night.  
There are no more shots heard and we can sleep in peace.*

A WOMAN FROM RIBBI CHIEFDOM (MOYAMBA DISTRICT) IN SIERRA LEONE

Armed violence—the intentional, threatened or actual use of arms to inflict death or injury—takes many forms around the world, but it always has devastating consequences. More than two thirds of reported victims of armed violence in 2011 lived in countries not in armed conflict. According to the Global Burden of Armed Violence,\* more than 500,000 people die worldwide every year as a consequence of armed violence. And the indirect consequences of armed violence extend far beyond these numbers when one considers injuries, forced migration and the impact of violence on people's livelihoods.

Crucially, Governments must be able to exercise legitimate authority and provide safety, security and development to their citizens. If they do not—e.g. if effective policing and a functioning rule of law are not provided—their citizens may seek to guarantee their security through alternative forms of self-protection, retributive justice or the resort to armed violence. As long as the human security of affected populations remains unanswered, both in terms of personal and socio-economic security, there will be demand for illicit small arms.

In an attempt to prevent and reduce armed violence, a number of national and regional Governments and local communities have established gun-free zones (GFZs). Obviously, such a measure cannot be taken in a vacuum; the root causes for the frequent carrying of guns in an unregulated setting must be addressed as well. But if embedded in a set of measures to reduce violence in a limited area, the establishment of GFZs may indeed contribute to improved perceptions of safety.

A variety of locations such as schools, businesses, municipal buildings, parks and plazas, or entire villages have been declared GFZs in different countries. However, the expertise on how best to establish and maintain GFZs has not been consolidated or systematically analysed.

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\* The Global Burden of Armed Violence is issued by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development Secretariat. See [www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2011.html](http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2011.html).

The aim of this paper is to bring together information and experiences from practitioners and policymakers and analyse the impact of GFZs in order to determine when and where GFZs can be a valuable measure to prevent and reduce armed violence. This will assist Governments, local authorities, and international development and peacebuilding agencies and organizations in gaining a better understanding of GFZs in order to incorporate, where applicable, this tool into their strategies to prevent and reduce armed violence.

**For a practical set of guidelines on how to establish and maintain GFZs, go to [www.un.org/disarmament](http://www.un.org/disarmament).**

## I. Introduction

Gun-free zones (GFZs) are to be found in every country. Legislation may differ, but typically civilians are not allowed to bring a gun into police stations, courts, parliaments, sports stadiums, airports, etc. While these areas could technically be qualified as “gun-free zones” (“gun-free” always applying to civilians, not to military, police or even private security companies), they are not the focus of this paper. This paper centers on GFZs established as a—mostly regional or local—complement to existing national regulation, as a specific ad hoc tool to prevent and reduce armed violence in communities where a large proportion of (attempted) homicides is perpetrated with illegal guns: countries affected by high levels of armed violence (above 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) or countries in post-conflict settings. Also, the paper does not go into detail on GFZs associated with armed conflict (e.g., “zones of peace” and refugee camps).

### **Safe spaces during armed conflict**

During armed conflict, some countries have established “safe zones” that often include a GFZ component. These include refugee camps and “zones of peace”. Refugee camps are temporary settlements built to receive individuals who have fled from conflict or persecution. United Nations guidelines on the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, recommended by the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, state that measures should be taken to disarm refugees (both civilians and ex-combatants) upon entrance into the camps. Camps are to be maintained weapon-free in order to “preserve the humanitarian and peaceful character of the institution of Asylum”.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, “peace zones” also may incorporate a GFZ component. Peace zones is a generic term that also covers “zones of life”, “sanctuaries of peace”, “spaces for peace” and “neutral zones”. These are areas of “community-based, people-led initiatives in local geographical areas which residents themselves have declared to be off-limits to armed conflict”.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, “peace zones” also prohibit individuals from carrying or possessing firearms within them.

<sup>1</sup> Rosa da Costa, “Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum” (PPLA/2004/02), Protection Policy And Legal Advice Section Department Of International Protection, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> GTZ Poverty Reduction and Conflict Transformation Project Team- Philippines, Practitioner’s guide: Peace Zones, 2009.

Five case studies are analysed, from Colombia, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands and South Africa. These were selected to reflect (1) geographical balance, (2) availability of documentation, (3) availability of data enabling a meaningful evaluation and analysis, and (4) diversity of armed violence contexts (post-conflict and violent armed crime). In all of these examples—and in this paper as a whole—it is the *illicit* gun ownership that centrally need to be addressed. The lawful possession of arms is not irrelevant in the context of GFZs, but it is not the central concern here, given that we focus on GFZs as a tool to help improve previously unruly settings of pervasive illegal gun ownership.

The five cases were initiated within a 12-year time frame, between 1993 and 2005, but a number of them continue today.

This paper uses terms as defined in the International Small Arms Control Standards, module 01.20—Glossary of terms, definitions and abbreviations.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Gun-free zones

### Definition

Gun-free zones are *geographically limited spaces where the carrying or possession of guns by civilians is prohibited in order to reduce armed violence and promote public safety*. A GFZ is one of several possible initiatives for preventing and reducing gun violence. In order for a GFZ to effectively prevent and reduce armed violence, it should always be established in conjunction with other gun control and violence prevention measures, in particular effective policing.

Compared to most other gun-control initiatives, GFZs are low-cost measures and are relatively easy to implement. Practitioners highlighted that, in settings of high armed violence, the appeal of GFZs is that they can be established virtually anywhere, may showcase alternative approaches to what constitutes authority, can become a focal area for improved policing, and thus “empower the

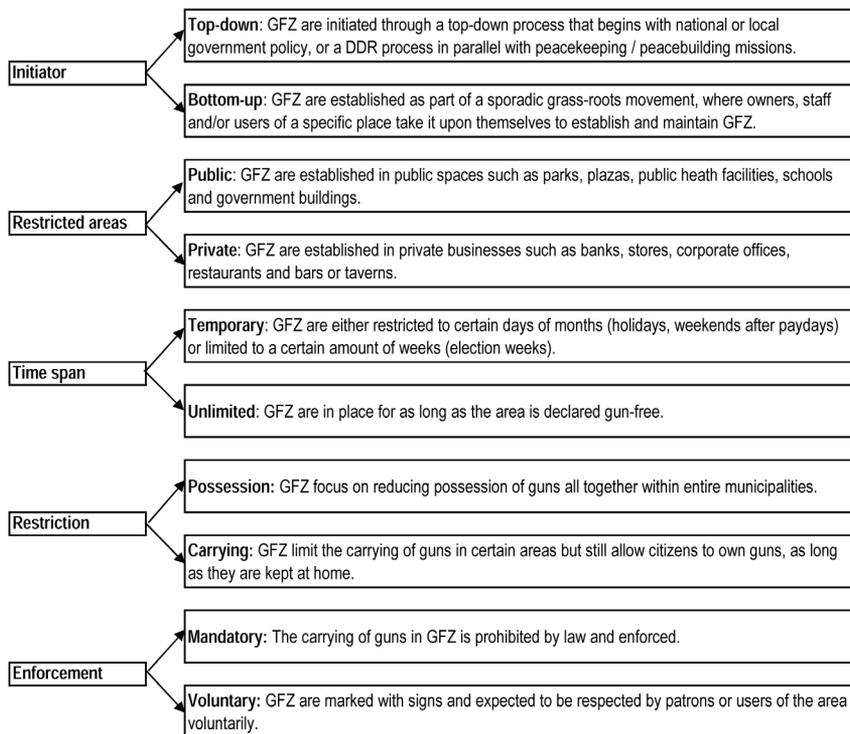
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<sup>1</sup> International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) are available from [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org).

gun-free majority” to transform their communities into safer places.<sup>2</sup> GFZs, which are usually signposted, are practical and visible, and therefore provide a concrete measure that, if correctly implemented, can have significant impact in a short time period.<sup>3</sup>

## Characteristics

Figure 1. Characteristics of GFZs



<sup>2</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Adèle Kirsten, former director of the Gun-Free South Africa (GFSa), 12 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Marcela Smutt, Coordinator of UNDP El Salvador Democratic Governance Program, 12 June 2012.

## Objectives

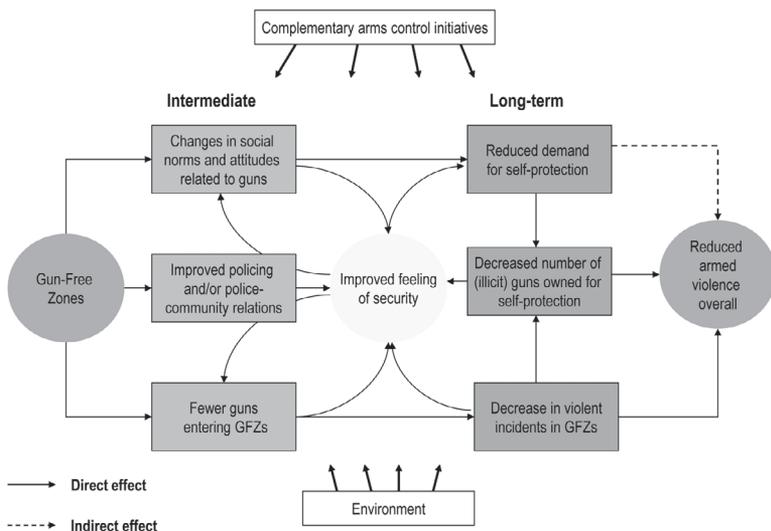
Focusing on intermediate and long-term outcomes of GFZs can help one understand how GFZ initiatives can contribute to reducing and preventing armed violence.

Figure 2 explains how the establishment of GFZs is supposed to lead to the intermediate and long-term outcomes necessary to reach an ultimate goal: reduction of armed violence and the creation of a safer space. The establishment of GFZs can lead to three intermediate outcomes: changes in social norms and attitudes related to guns; improved policing and/or police-community relations; and fewer guns entering GFZs.

These intermediate outcomes may have a positive influence on individual and collective perceptions of security which, in turn, can lead to the three long-term outcomes: reduced demand for self-protection; decreased number of (illicit) guns owned for self-protection; and decrease in violent incidents in GFZs.

The intermediate and the long-term objective may contribute together to the reduction of armed violence overall.

**Figure 2. How GFZs work**



## **Goal: reduced armed violence overall**

Even though the goal to reduce armed violence as such is not always clearly articulated, the reason for establishing GFZs pointed in all cases to that broader and more distant goal. Again, it is important to underline that GFZs are only one component of a wider set of strategies needed to reduce armed violence. GFZs alone will not necessarily lead to lower armed violence. GFZs are also not a substitute for legislation regulating guns or for programmes in a wider region that address the demand for self-protection with weapons.

## **Intermediate outcome 1: fewer guns entering GFZs**

The first intermediate outcome is the actual reduction in the number of individuals feeling the need to enter the designated area with a gun. GFZs that failed to reach this initial outcome were unlikely to achieve any of the other outcomes necessary for reducing armed violence and increasing feelings of safety. Even GFZs in a post-conflict context, which tend to concentrate on reducing possession, may pass through a phase of reduction in carrying (while guns may be kept at home), as an initial step.

## **Intermediate outcome 2: change in social norms and attitudes related to guns**

GFZs are often established in places where a legacy of armed conflict has left an entrenched culture of violence, where guns have become commonplace—valued both as a masculine symbol of domination and as a means of protection due to a lack of police presence. Designating areas as GFZs is a way of validating that security is being provided at a communal level, not only through the individual. It is a way for communities that suffered from the consequences of armed violence to ascertain that progress has been made in the provision of safety for all, challenging the earlier acceptance of gun carrying as a norm. Signage identifying GFZs send a message to all citizens as they go about their daily lives visiting parks and markets, going to a clinic or a school, that their lives are valued and guarded through a communal effort.

### **Intermediate outcome 3: improved policing and/or police-community relations**

GFZs can be a mechanism to build police capacity to deal with illegal guns, including: capacity to patrol, monitor, search, seize and collect weapons, collect and generate statistics on armed crime and improve gun record-keeping. Increased police activity and visibility in GFZs, coupled with positive interactions with community members in the planning and implementation phases of GFZs, can lead to improved perceptions of police protection and of relations between officers and the community. Other complementary initiatives to increase policing capacity and community relations such as further training, better resources and infrastructure, and improved leadership can also help strengthen GFZ implementation.

### **Intermediate outcome 4: improved feeling of security**

The perception of vulnerability to crime may diminish in areas where it can be assumed that no one carries a gun. This is particularly important in post-conflict settings or areas with persistent high crime rates where effective policing has been introduced. Reduced gun carrying would thus contribute to fewer incidents of armed violence as well as reduced visibility of guns in these areas, also contributing to increased perceptions of security.

Factors beyond the scope of a GFZ can assist in positively influencing feelings of security. Apart from policing activity, these include functioning street lighting, maintenance of an area, and social cohesion within a community.

### **Long-term outcome 1: reduced demand for self-protection**

When at the community level the rule of law and effective police enforcement are being improved, demand for self-protection will wane.

### **Long-term outcome 2: decreased number of (illicit) guns owned for self-protection**

Over time, as a result of GFZs, there should be a systematic and consistent reduction of typical factors of demand for illicit guns.

Shrinking demand should lead to fewer acquisitions and/or more individuals giving up their firearm.

### **Long-term outcome 3: decrease in violent incidents in GFZs**

The combination of increased feelings of security, also through better law enforcement, and reduced possession and demand for guns should lead to fewer incidents of armed violence and crime within GFZs. As GFZs become safer spaces, they could expand to new areas. The result of this growing patchwork of GFZs, showcasing effective policing, should reinforce the cycle of less civilians carrying a gun, less demand for individual firearm-based self-protection, and more security—and eventually contribute to the overall goal of reducing armed violence.

### **Impact of GFZs**

Existing evaluations and research on the impact of gun-control policies face limitations, due to limited data and the difficulty in constructing an efficient evaluation design to accurately identify the impacts of such policies. Evaluating the impact of GFZs poses similar challenges. GFZs have been difficult to evaluate for three central reasons: (1) what to measure; (2) how to measure it (design and data collection); and (3) how to isolate the effect of the intervention from other simultaneous efforts (evaluation design).

The graphic representation of how GFZ work in figure 2 suggests that all identified outcomes are closely linked. If any of the proposed outcomes is not achieved, the logic chain breaks down and successive desired outcomes are unlikely to manifest. By analysing the different outcomes of figure 2, it is possible to identify where a GFZ is achieving success and where it might be experiencing difficulties. Consequently, this paper proposes a series of outcome and impact indicators for monitoring and evaluating GFZs.

## **GFZ outcome and impact indicators**

### **Goal: reduced armed violence overall**

Indicator 1: gun homicide rate (city, or state level)

Indicator 2: hospitalizations for injury with a gun (city, or state level)

### **Intermediate outcome 1: fewer guns entering GFZs**

Indicator 1: ratio of guns confiscated by police in GFZs to the number of police searches (or patrols) performed in GFZs

Indicator 2: frequency with which survey respondents report seeing guns carried in GFZ areas

#### *Alternative*

Indicator 1: number of violations reported by staff or security in GFZ areas

### **Intermediate outcome 2: change in social norms and attitudes related to guns**

Indicator 1: percentage of survey respondents who consider carrying a gun in public to represent a threat to community safety

Indicator 2: percentage of survey respondents who believe having a gun makes them safer

### **Intermediate outcome 3: improved policing capacity and/or community relations**

Indicator 1: number of search and seizures/weapons collections performed

Indicator 2: change in the accuracy/level of statistics generated on armed crime

Indicator 3: percentage of police interviewed/responding to a survey indicating perception of increased capacity to control guns

Indicator 4: percentage of survey respondents (population) indicating perception of increased efficiency of the police to control guns

### **Intermediate outcome 4: improved feeling of security**

Indicator 1: level of security felt in specific GFZ areas, as reported by survey respondents

Indicator 2: level of security felt in general in the community, as reported by survey respondents

#### *Alternative*

Indicator 1: reported frequency of hearing gunshots

**Long-term outcome 1: reduced demand for self-protection**

Indicator 1: percentage of survey respondents that report wanting to purchase a gun for self-protection and protection of family

Indicator 2: percentage of survey respondents that report intending to purchase a gun

**Long-term outcome 2: decreased number of (illicit) guns owned for self-protection**

Indicator 1: guns registered

Indicator 2: percentage of survey respondents who report having a gun in the home

Indicator 3: guns turned in (to police or in voluntary buybacks and amnesties)

**Long-term outcome 3: decrease in violent incidents in GFZs**

Indicator 1: number of homicides committed in or near GFZ areas

Indicator 2: percentage of survey respondents who have witnessed a violent incident with a gun in a GFZ

There are obstacles to identifying the specific effect of GFZs, also because GFZs are typically implemented together with other policies. Moreover, there is the challenge of the “counter-factual” argument: *would the same outcomes have been achieved even without GFZs?* To address these obstacles, most evaluations are designed to observe changes in indicators before and after (and sometimes during) the intervention. Evaluations may also involve the use of control groups (where GFZs have not been implemented) or comparison with national trends.

Data collection can be challenging in countries with limited resources to that end. Even though the collection of data on armed violence has improved in many countries, measuring armed violence is inherently difficult and is bound to contain imperfections. The homicide rate (homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) is generally recognized as the most accurate indicator of overall levels of armed violence in a country, city or region.<sup>4</sup> Two possible sources for these data are police crime statistics and public health data. The latter body

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<sup>4</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat, “Measuring and Monitoring Armed Violence: Goals, targets and indicators”, background paper of the Oslo Conference on Armed Violence, April 2010, p. 15. Available from [http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Indicators/Metrics\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Indicators/Metrics_Paper.pdf).

is generally more accurate because most countries require death certificates to be registered.

For measuring non-fatal injuries, the most commonly used indicators are emergency room admissions or victimization surveys. Victimization surveys can be useful for capturing information about injury in rural areas not covered by emergency room services.<sup>5</sup> More subjective data related to feelings of security, or desire and intent to purchase a gun, should ideally be captured in a household survey. Where such data collection proves to be too difficult or too costly, these indicators could conceivably be measured through focus groups or interviews.

### **III. Establishment of GFZs**

#### **Implementing GFZs**

The GFZs analysed for this paper were either established in post-conflict settings, such as the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone or in countries heavily affected by (urban) armed violence, such as South Africa, El Salvador and Colombia. In post-conflict settings, GFZs were implemented in parallel with or shortly after disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes.

#### **Sierra Leone—restriction on possession**

The Arms for Development project in Sierra Leone began in 2002, after three phases of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes had been implemented intermittently (1998-1999, 1999-2000, 2001-2002) during and after the 11-year civil war. A pilot project initiated by the UNDP and the Government of Sierra Leone in November 2002 targeted four chiefdoms that were encouraged to surrender their weapons. When no weapons were found after random searches, the chiefdom was declared weapons free and awarded 40 million leones (USD\$ 14,000) for the implementation of a community development project. In 2004 the project was expanded to include 15 chiefdoms and later 32 chiefdoms in 2005.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

### **South Africa—grass-roots movement to establish GFZ in private locations**

South Africa was the first to coin the term “gun-free zone” when the Gun Free South Africa Movement began to materialize early in 1995 in the aftermath of the end of apartheid and transition to a democratic government. The establishment of GFZs was largely a grass-roots movement spearheaded by the non-governmental organization Gun Free South Africa (GFSA) and spread throughout the country as an increasing number of locations voluntarily declared themselves gun free. Eventually the country’s new gun-control legislation approved in 2000 would include a provision for establishing formal Firearms Free Zones (FFZs); however, no examples of officially declared FFZs could be found at the time of writing. Many of the voluntary, individually initiated GFZs still continue today and have largely become a normal feature in South African towns and cities.

### **Understanding the dynamics of armed violence**

The process of establishing GFZs usually begins with an analysis of the particular dynamics of armed violence. Coming to a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of armed violence in a particular country, region or city was an important first step in determining why, how and where to establish GFZs.

Prior to the implementation of the first carrying restrictions in Colombia in 1993, the homicide rate had risen from 46 to 88 per 100,000 inhabitants in 10 years. A large increase in interpersonal violence had taken place in two of the largest cities, Cali and Bogotá, where homicide rates reached 124 and 68 per 100,000 respectively in 1994. At the time it was found that 80 per cent of these homicides involved a firearm. To monitor these trends, injury surveillance systems were created in both cities. Based on this information and relevant police data, the decision was made to restrict gun carrying within city limits on holidays, weekends after paydays and election days (all periods where homicides rates were at their highest).

### **Colombia—temporary GFZs limited to certain days**

The very first case includes temporary GFZs established in the Colombian cities of Cali (1993) as part of the Programme for Peace Security and Peace and the *Programa Vida Sagrada* (Sacred Life Programme) in Bogotá (1995). These GFZs were not only limited to certain geographical areas (municipalities), but also to specific times including weekends, holidays and election days. In 2008 the city of Medellín implemented a city-wide restriction that was later made permanent (not only during weekends and holidays) and further extended in mid-2009 to the whole department. Between December 2009 and February 2010, the initiative was extended to 18 Colombian departments plus the capital city of Bogotá during the end-of-the-year holiday season.

During 2011 the GFZ restrictions in Bogotá were implemented during a sum total of 174 days (six months and 11 days). The last restriction of 2011 carried through to January 2012. This was later extended through August 2012.

Information obtained in an interview with Dr. Juan Pablo Hernandez, Programa Vida Sagrada of the Bogotá Mayor's Office, June 19, 2012

Similarly, in El Salvador, GFZs were chosen as part of a strategy to reduce gun violence based on extensive research over several years before their implementation. In 2003, a study by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), *Armas de Fuego y Violencia* (Firearms and Violence), was undertaken to determine the impact of armed violence, explore attitudes about firearms and analyse the existing legal framework at the time. The investigation found that 65 per cent of homicides were committed with a firearm and 50 per cent of gun-related homicides were committed with registered firearms.<sup>6</sup> The results of the study as well as inspiration from experiences restricting carrying of firearms in other countries (Bogotá, Cali and South Africa) contributed to the design of the pilot Gun-Free Municipalities project.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> UNDP and Sociedad Sin Violencia, *Informe Armas de Fuego y Violencia* (San Salvador, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Godnick, "An Examination of the Impact Of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes", p. 159.

### **El Salvador—Municipios Libres de Armas**

In 2005 the El Salvadorian Government, supported by UNDP, initiated a strategy for preventing armed violence that began with a pilot project *Municipios Libres de Armas*, or Gun-Free Municipalities, implemented in the cities of San Martín and Ilopango. In the later half of 2006, the municipalities of Santa Ana and Santa Tecla also began implementing plans for GFZs. By 2008 the National Council on Public Security planned to expand GFZs to 30 of the most violent cities in the nation. New legislation was approved in 2008 allowing municipalities to implement *vedas de armas*, or gun bans, for 60 days. This type of ban has been incorporated into the municipal safety plans of many of the 30 municipalities selected and are being accompanied by the Ministry of Justice.

The two case studies that took place in post-conflict contexts (Sierra Leone and Solomon Islands) faced the issues of gun stockpiles that continued to be hoarded in chiefdoms or villages. These stockpiles threatened peace accords, community cohesion, reconciliation and economic and social development. In both cases, assessments were undertaken of the types and numbers of weapons estimated to be in local holdings (based on information obtained by ex-combatants, procurement records and information on guns looted from existing stockpiles).

### **Solomon Islands—restriction on possession**

In the Solomon Islands, the Weapons Free Villages campaign was initiated in August 2002 by the Peace Monitoring Council, the local counterpart of the International Peace Monitoring Team, formed to help ensure implementation of the Townsville Peace Agreements that ended three years of conflict between indigenous Gualese and Malaitan armed groups. The campaign coincided with DDR initiatives and was complemented in 2003 by the presence of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). By 2004, approximately 1,000 villages had been declared weapons free.

## **Assessing the legal feasibility of GFZs**

GFZs should not contradict existing legislation; on the contrary, they are stronger when they are supported by national laws, municipal ordinances and institutional policies. Therefore, before setting up GFZs, existing legislation to guarantee their feasibility should be studied. In El Salvador, for example, an assessment completed early in

2005 determined that, by law, mayors had the right to regulate the use of public spaces. However, a complete ban on carrying firearms would violate the national law, which recognizes the right to carry a weapon under legally permitted circumstances. A complete municipality-wide ban was likely to be overturned; hence the recommendation of the study was to limit GFZs to specifically designated areas.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Colombian constitution, the State maintains formal ownership of all firearms, only granting holding and carrying permits to those who fulfil security requirements. While the national government has been opposed to permanent bans, current regulations now allow for local authorities to request authorization to temporarily suspend carrying licenses from the military commander of their region.<sup>9</sup>

In the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone, legislation was introduced in the aftermath of gun collection programmes to ban gun possession throughout the national territory. In 1999, the Solomon Islands Prime Minister invoked the 1968 *Firearms Act* (amended in 1989/2000), which allowed him to prohibit the possession, use and carrying of firearms in any given area, at any given time. This was later followed by the 2003 *Facilitation of International Assistance Act* specifying that only designated members of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) could legitimately possess and carry weapons in the country.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, after the last 2002 gun amnesty in Sierra Leone, where citizens were asked to voluntarily surrender their guns, it became illegal to possess arms, ammunition and explosives in the country.<sup>11</sup>

The clear outlier of the five cases is South Africa, where the legal foundation for GFZs was not grounded on the national firearm legislation. Rather, it was rooted in anti-trespassing laws. Instead of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Dr. Juan Pablo Hernandez, 19 June 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Solomon Islands, *National Report of the Solomon Islands on its Implementation of the United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects (UNPoA) 2004* (New York, UNODA, 2004) 7. Available from: <http://www.poa-iss.org/NationalReport/NationalReports.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> Miller and others, *From Research to Road Map*, p. 17.

constituting a criminal offense, bringing a gun into a GFZ could be prosecuted as a civil offence under laws that prohibit trespassing. While South Africa is a clear example that it is possible to establish GFZs without legislation specifically designed for them, practitioners agreed that it is preferable that the GFZs' legal foundation be firmly rooted in specific firearms laws and regulations, first, because it shows that GFZs are undertaken as a partnership between Government and society, and second, because such laws can provide the mandate for police and Government to help enforce GFZs.<sup>12</sup>

### **Senegal—temporary GFZ around elections**

In December 2011, the Minister of Interior issued a ministerial decree to ban the carrying of weapons and ammunitions as well as explosive devices between the period of January 2012 and April 2012. During this period, no weapon regardless of its category or nature could be transported outside of homes or workplaces. This ban applied to nationals and foreigners holding permits to carry or hold arms.

Ministerial decree Nr. 14796 of 30 December 2011

## **Defining characteristics of GFZs**

Decisions on the locations and design of GFZs have been clearly anchored in the diagnosis of the particular dynamics of armed violence (as described above), context and legal specificities. In Colombia, GFZs were located in specific cities with above-average firearm homicide levels. Considering limitations created by the legal context, which does not allow for permanent bans, GFZs were limited to the specific days when homicides had historically been the highest. Similarly, in El Salvador one of the main criteria for determining GFZ locations was the incidence of armed crimes committed in these areas. Protected areas were chosen by the municipality, with input from the National Civilian Police, through an assessment of the locations with a high incidence of violent crime.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being areas prone to violence, other considerations such as sympathetic constituencies, local leadership and protection of specific types of community spaces should be considered.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Joseph Dube, 12 June 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*, p. 18.

In South Africa for example, although Gun Free South Africa (GFSA) supported any entity wishing to become gun free, venues were strategically targeted when they: (1) had leadership close to community concerns (religious institutions, NGOs); (2) had a link to conflict and/or the negative consequences of gun violence (health facilities, bars); and (3) were commonly agreed-upon areas where many vulnerable gather (schools, hospitals).<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the Arms for Development initiative in Sierra Leone targeted chiefdoms through local consultations, taking into account local reports on proliferation of small arms, reports from the DDR process and consultancy with the local leaders.<sup>15</sup> Considering that resources (human and financial) are usually limited in GFZ initiatives, directing efforts to areas where the local community and leaders support the initiative can be more effective.

#### **Venezuela—GFZ to reduce gun violence**

In May 2012 the Presidential Commission for the Control of Arms, Ammunition and Disarmament in Venezuela enacted three resolutions creating Gun-Free Zones throughout the country as part of a comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence. The resolutions, published in Official Gazette No. 39.928 on May 23, 2012, prohibit citizens from carrying a gun in specified areas—open or closed venues where public events, games or shows are held; anywhere alcohol is sold, such as bars, restaurants, nightclubs and dance halls and construction zones (public and private) throughout the country. The GFZs are to be enforced by authorities, which are able to confiscate, register, store and destroy firearms and ammunition.

### **Organizing a participatory process**

In many of the case studies observed, ample time and space were provided for community debate on GFZs. Setting aside time for discussion in the beginning was perceived as particularly crucial since it allows people to speak out, raise their fears and be heard. In the Sierra Leone Arms for Development project, community public-awareness meetings were held to present the concept, debate the issue and vote on becoming a weapon-free chiefdom. A comparable process

<sup>14</sup> Kirsten, “Islands of Safety in a Sea of Guns”, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Napoleon Abdulai, 24 July 2012.

also took place through the Weapons Free Village campaign in the Solomon Islands. Through these consultation processes it is hoped that stakeholders will collectively come to some consensus on establishing GFZs.<sup>16</sup> This consensus then creates the community buy-in, trust, and social cohesion necessary for GFZs to be successful.

In the cases of El Salvador and Colombia, little information was found about such community consultation and discussion processes. In El Salvador, however, interviewees did mention that the municipal ordinances were circulated and received input from the business sector, religious institutions and other civil society groups.<sup>17</sup> This was a different way of consulting with the community in a larger, urban environment.

### **Creating an organizational structure**

As noted earlier, some of the cases displayed a top-down approach while others followed a more bottom-up approach. The roles of national governments, international organizations, local authorities and civil society in each case varied accordingly.

In South Africa, the national government did not play a large role in the establishment and maintenance of GFZs until late 2000 when Firearm Free Zones became part of the national legislation. Through a grass-roots movement GFZs were established by individuals, groups, businesses or local governmental institutions. There were several types of GFZs in operation: those initiated by GFSAs, those privately initiated (generally by banks and corporations), and others that were established by governmental initiative. GFZs initiated by GFSAs (bars, clinics, schools, organizations and other interested entities) received materials and help from GFSAs volunteer facilitators. They relied on a highly participatory process to create commitment and were enforced through trust. Facilitators were trained by GFSAs and then, in turn, trained other facilitators.<sup>18</sup> These facilitators implemented a participatory process by consulting with different stakeholders, including owners and managers of areas declared GFZs, users (students, teachers, medical personnel and clients) and the wider

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<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Joseph Dube, 12 June 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Marcela Smutt and Daniel Carsana, 12 June 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Joseph Dube, 12 June 2012.

community.<sup>19</sup> To initiate a GFZ, proponents were encouraged to hold a workshop gathering these different stakeholders for a discussion on gun control and maintenance of GFZs. As was later emphasized in the 2006 evaluation, ensuring the continued participation and engagement of these stakeholders, even after declaration of the GFZ, was the key to enforcing GFZ status.<sup>20</sup> In comparison, the individually initiated GFZs were usually started by business owners who put up their own notices without necessarily involving their clients. Finally, governmental GFZs were set up by local governments through municipal laws or ordinances and often had no gun-free signage.<sup>21</sup>

Building local leadership and creating space for community participation were essential considerations in the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone. The two case studies used similar organizational structures to involve a wide range of stakeholders. These cases were implemented with significant support from national governments and international partners (UNDP). In the Solomon Islands, the Peace Monitoring Council, which became later known as the National Peace Council in 2003 was the central actor in the Weapons Free Village campaign. This council is an independent, non-partisan indigenous organization that functions as an advisory body to the national government. The National Peace Council has a chairman and nine advisors from each province of the Solomon Islands who direct 87 peace monitors working at 11 monitoring posts in rural areas. These monitors presented the Weapons Free Village concept to the village chief and organized a consultative group to discuss the concept.

The same basic structure was used by the Arms for Development programme in Sierra Leone, with a few key differences. First, the UNDP played a much larger role as an implementing partner, instead of merely providing funding and support as was the case in the Solomon Islands. Second, at the national level, the Arms for Development steering committee structure represented a much more diverse group of stakeholders. Finally, police and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) were directly involved at the national, district and local levels. At the local level, UNDP field assistants played a role similar to GFSA facilitators and National

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<sup>19</sup> Kirsten, “Islands of safety in a sea of guns”, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>21</sup> Kirsten, “Islands of safety in a sea of guns”, p. 47.

Peace Council monitors. Similar to the Weapons Free Village campaign, local Project Management Committees were elected in each chiefdom and included representatives of women, youth, elders and traditional authorities.<sup>22</sup>

In El Salvador and Colombia decision-making structures were more top-down in nature. This may be due to the fact that the municipalities involved were high-density urban areas, rather than rural villages. Civil society groups were involved mainly in awareness-raising and did not appear to have a formal role within decision-making structures.

The table below summarizes the stakeholders effectively involved in GFZ implementation at the national, district and local levels for all the cases observed.

**Table. Stakeholders responsible for GFZ implementation**

	South Africa	Solomon Islands	Sierra Leone	El Salvador	Colombia
National level	GFSA (civil society)	National Peace Council, RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission), UNDP	<u>Steering committee</u> : UNDP, national government, national police, UNAMSIL (United Nations peacekeeping mission), civil society, Youth Empowerment Programme	<u>Coordinating unit</u> : national government, UNDP  <u>Technical committee</u> : mayor's offices, national police, National Commission on Public Security, UNDP	Colombian military (responsible for approval of carrying restrictions)
District level		National Peace Council representatives from each province	<u>District working group</u> : district council (gov.), Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (civil society), police, UNDP, UNAMSIL (United Nations peacekeeping mission)		Governors of 18 departments (2009/2010), Regional military commander (responsible for approval)

<sup>22</sup> UNDP, *Arms For Development Draft Annual Report 2004*, p. 17.

	South Africa	Solomon Islands	Sierra Leone	El Salvador	Colombia
Local level	GfSA facilitators, owners/ administrators and users of GFZs (local police where possible)	National Peace Council monitors  <u>Consultative council</u> : women, elders, village authority	<u>Project management committee</u> : UNDP field assistant, women representatives, youth representatives, elder representatives, traditional authorities	<u>Municipal execution units</u> : chiefs of police, city council members, Corps of Municipal Agents and the project coordinator (UNDP)	City mayors, local police

In El Salvador, the Gun-Free Municipalities programme exhibited difficulties with leadership at the local level. The fact that local actors did not take ownership of the project constituted a major obstacle. The mayors involved felt that the project was being imposed by the National Commission on Public Security. Local authorities disagreed specifically with communication strategies, which they claim did not make use of local media, and cultural activities that they felt should be oriented more towards training and jobs for youth than mere recreation.<sup>23</sup>

Also notable is the limited involvement of Government and police in South Africa’s GFZs. Participation by the national government could have helped to standardize GFZs across the country, while also providing for and underpinning regulation and necessary resources. GFSA encouraged communities to include local police in GFZ planning, but this was not always possible. The police had no legal responsibility to help enforce GFZs and relations between police and communities were often strained. While many South African GFZs were enforced on the basis of trust and community commitment, practitioners agreed that involving local police made GFZs stronger.

Capacity-building may be required in order to enable local law enforcement and community-based policing to implement and maintain GFZs. In South Africa, GFSA became a hub for building the capacity of local groups to implement GFZs, including through written materials, assistance, training and awareness-raising activities

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<sup>23</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*

on armed violence and practical ways to establish and maintain GFZs. In Sierra Leone, both the district working groups and local project management committees received extensive training. In addition to maintaining the weapon-free status of the community, project management committees were also directly involved in weapons collections and in the administration of community development projects awarded to them afterwards. Furthermore, they were trained in community security and arms control procedures; safety and handling of weapons; weapons registration; certification process; monitoring of arms-free status; CBO registration; community consultation; project planning and implementation; proposal/budget writing; and monitoring and reporting.

### **GFSA 5-step model for gun-free schools**

- Step 1* *Talk.* This includes the whole community: teachers, students, parents, the school governing body and the local police. A facilitator should lead this process and set up a working group with representatives from each stakeholder group to take the process forward.
- Step 2* *Draft a written policy* within the working group that is approved by all stakeholders at a joint workshop. Elect a safety team that will be responsible for ensuring implementation and assisting in enforcement.
- Step 3* *Adopt the policy.* The policy should be adopted by the school and then be formally declared a FFZ by the Minister of Safety and Security through application to be registered as an official FFZ.
- Step 4* *Implement the policy.* A safety team (elected previously at the workshop in step 2) takes responsibility for making sure signs are displayed and for working with others in the school to monitor gun-free status.
- Step 5* *Maintain* the FFZ by setting up systems to remind people and inform new arrivals and visitors of the firearm-free policy.

### **Developing a GFZ plan**

GFZs were found to be more effective if they were experienced as being an integral part of community decision-making. This does not preclude national or provincial policy on GFZs, which can encourage local initiatives to this end; it simply shows the value of nurturing

dependencies between individuals forming a community. Therefore, it is considered most conducive if each location develops and maintains its distinct GFZ plan. The GFZ plan helps make an area gun-free through each location's own institutional, organizational or corporate rules. It may specify detailed procedures for GFZ communication (sign, website, verbal notice, etc.), maintenance and enforcement, as well as actions to be taken in case of violation.

In 2000, five years after the beginning of the GFZ movement in South Africa, an audit of 461 GFZs found that having an official, written policy in place increased the likelihood of their actual enforcement—69 per cent of institutions surveyed that had a written policy were found to actively enforce them. The same study finds that when there is a policy in place, staff members are more likely to understand what a GFZ is and why it can be beneficial.<sup>24</sup> These conclusions suggest that institutions and administrators of GFZs should be encouraged to develop formal plans instead of implementing them in an improvised and ad hoc manner.

### **Declaring GFZs**

The official declaration of an area as gun-free and the communication of that status are essential initial actions. They may include community celebrations, certificates and official declaration ceremonies. Thereafter, consistent messaging through signs, verbal and written communications and media will consolidate these areas as gun-free. Where communication breaks down, GFZs are unlikely to produce the desired outcomes.

In the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone, once inspectors were convinced that a village or chiefdom no longer contained weapons, a public ceremony was held. Often these ceremonies were given ample coverage by radio and print media. A “Weapons Free Declaration” was signed by village leaders and a certificate was given. In the Solomon Islands the declaration involved a solemn pledge that local leaders would work to keep weapons out of their villages. In Sierra Leone, the declaration phase involved signing of an official Weapons Free Statute and a prosecution document noting that individuals in possession of

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<sup>24</sup> Nicolene Vienings and Claire Taylor, “Gun-free Zone Audit”, GFSA/CSVR research report. (Johannesburg, GFSA/CSVR, 2000).

weapons afterwards would be prosecuted. In both cases, these declarations were followed by feasts, traditional ceremonies and celebration. In South Africa, often a press conference or press release would be issued officially declaring a business, school or institution a GFZ.

Declaring an area as gun-free was also an opportunity to undertake additional awareness-raising campaigns on the dangers of guns. In the case of the Solomon Islands, the Weapons Free Villages were accompanied by awareness-raising events such as parades or marches.<sup>25</sup> In El Salvador an initial awareness-raising campaign lasted six months, using the campaign slogans *San Martín Vivo, Libre de Armas* and *Ilopango Vivo, Libre de Armas* (San Martín Alive and Arms free; Ilopango Alive and Arms-Free). The campaign was promoted through ten national radio stations, advertisements on buses and on billboards placed at the municipal limits. Pamphlets, key chains, bumper stickers and t-shirts were also distributed.<sup>26</sup>

Signage was used in most of the five case studies. In the Solomon Islands, a Weapons Free sign was posted at the entrance of the village asking others to respect the wishes of the villagers not to bring guns back into their community. In El Salvador, signs were posted in approximately 60 gun-free areas.<sup>27</sup> In South Africa many GFZs were denoted with the signature GFSAs-provided sign showing a crossed-out gun accompanied by the phrase, “This is a gun-free zone”.

The media served as a key platform for communication of gun-free status in all cases. Other methods included mentioning GFZ status on websites, in institutional email signatures and letterheads.<sup>28</sup>

Maintaining awareness with new staff and users of gun-free locations was particularly challenging. For these reasons, it is recommended that information about GFZ status and policy be incorporated into trainings and induction of new staff or members of these locations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews conducted by Heather Sutton with Adèle Kirsten, 12 June 2012 and Joseph Dube, 13 June 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Joseph Dube, June 2012.

### **South Africa—gun-free stadiums**

For the duration of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, weapons were banned from participating stadiums in South Africa partly as a result of the Gun-Free World Cup campaign of the International Action Network on Small Arms. The campaign ensured support from a number of international football players who donned the campaign t-shirt produced by designer Katharine Hamnett with the slogan “Don’t Shoot: Gun-Free World Cup”.

## **Maintaining and enforcing GFZs**

The cases examined, displayed different methods of enforcement according to their environment and situations. GFZs that involved banks, corporate businesses and government buildings relied on the use of metal detectors and physical searches. GFZs established in open public spaces relied upon patrolling by police and/or security guards. GFZs that involved taverns, restaurants, schools, NGOs, clinics and religious institutions relied simply on trusting those entering to declare their guns and leave them outside. In all cases it is clear that there must be constant monitoring of GFZs and clear actions taken when a violation occurs.

The Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone offer examples of GFZs that are enforced without having to implement high security features. After initial weapons searches were conducted and villages or chiefdoms were declared weapon-free, these communities relied on community pressure and trust for continued enforcement. In the Solomon Islands, monitoring was conducted loosely and informally by local National Peace Council inspectors, who would report possible violations to the RAMSI. If illegal weapons were detected and not turned over to the National Peace Council, enforcement of legal penalties was guaranteed by RAMSI. Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the local police and community leaders enforced the gun-free status by seizing or reporting any illegal guns found in the village.<sup>30</sup> The initial arms-free verification exercise included a house-to-house search of 30 per cent of the villages within a chiefdom organized jointly by the Sierra Leone police and the local Project Management Committee.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Napoleon Abdulai, 24 July 2012.

After the verification the police would continue to monitor the communities and if necessary withdraw weapons-free certification.<sup>31</sup>

In Colombia and El Salvador, enforcement was firmly rooted in police patrols and search and seizures. The Gun-Free Municipalities project in El Salvador went to great lengths to increase police capacity to enforce GFZs. During the project, an additional 30 police officers were added in both municipalities and were dedicated almost exclusively to GFZ enforcement. Sixty metal detectors were purchased and the police were given ample training on community policing, the municipal ordinances themselves and how to enforce them. Training was important, not only for the technical aspects of enforcing GFZs, but also to convince officers that this type of measure can have an impact.<sup>32</sup> One of the reasons for different outcomes in San Martín and Ilopango was the marked difference in police engagement in the two municipalities. According to a 2007 evaluation of the project, police leaders in San Martín were highly committed to the project and went beyond what was required of them to make it a success.<sup>33</sup>

As an alternative or complement to *coercive* enforcement measures, two of the case studies analysed developed *positive* incentives for maintaining gun-free areas. Positive incentives to remain gun-free in the Solomon Islands included: (1) positive public recognition for the village (through media); (2) favourable status for development projects (by including the Weapons Free Villages in a National Peace Council database available to donors, Government and churches); and (3) sporting equipment donated to each village when entire wards (groups of villages) were declared gun-free. The combination of negative consequences for individuals violating Weapons Free Villages (confiscation of weapons and prosecution) and positive incentives for the collective community was seen as a key factor in the success of the campaign.<sup>34</sup> Under a similar

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<sup>31</sup> UNDP and Government of Sierra Leone, Arms for Development Operational Protocol, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Marcella Smutt and Daniel Carsana, 12 June 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Carol Nelson, “Women and Disarmament: What can be learnt from conflicts in Solomon Islands, Bougainville and PNG?” In the Right Hands Seminar, 21-24 February 2006, pp. 2-4.

logic, community development projects were provided to arms-free chiefdoms through the Sierra Leone Arms for Development programme. The gun-free status of these communities was continually monitored by the police and could be revoked if violations were found (causing the community to lose funding).

### **Sierra Leone—Arms for Development**

In 2007, 15 community development projects had been completed. Examples include:

- A new secondary school in Gbanty Kamaranka chiefdom. The Principal of the school commented: “before this time we used makeshift buildings as classrooms. Now with UNDP support, our community can boast of a school building which can accommodate 400 pupils”.
- A multipurpose community centre in Tane chiefdom. A youth leader explained that “the new community center will boost social activists in the township and thus will encourage the youngsters to stay in the community”.
- A four-classroom building for 120 new pupils and toilet facilities for senior secondary classes in Safroko Limba chiefdom. The additional infrastructure was strongly advocated for by women in the community and has provided space for their girl children to get an education within the community.

Source: Arms for Development, UNDP Sierra Leone End of Year 2007 Progress Report.

## **IV. Measuring impact**

### **Reducing armed violence**

A study on GFZs in Cali and Bogotá, Colombia, showed that the restrictions on gun carrying on holidays, weekends after paydays and election days significantly decreased homicide rates. Homicide rates were 14 per cent lower in Cali and 13 per cent lower in Bogotá during GFZ days than on non-GFZ days. The study also found that the effect was not confined to killings with firearms. Homicides not committed with firearms (close to 20 per cent of the total number of homicides in

both cities) were also reduced on GFZ days. This may be a result of the increased police activity and visibility on GFZ days.<sup>35</sup>

A second Colombian study was conducted in 2010, when temporary GFZs were extended to 18 Colombian departments (regional administrative units) for the end-of-the-year holiday season. This study compared their homicide rates with 14 departments not having a temporary GFZ in place. The conclusion supports the findings of the study in 2000. Departments where temporary GFZs were established had average homicide rates that were 23 per cent lower than those in the control group on the same days. A total of 144 fewer homicides during the holiday season can be attributed to the restrictions on gun carrying in public areas during these same days.<sup>36</sup>

A 2007 evaluation of the Gun-Free Municipalities project in El Salvador analysed the impact of that project on homicide rates in the cities of San Martín and Ilopango by comparing the homicide rates with two neighbouring cities, Soyopango and Tonactepeque, which served as control municipalities. Estimating the impact of the project was difficult given the short period of implementation (one year) and the limitations of data collected (inconsistencies between sources and limited survey samples). Aggregated data from the pilot municipalities showed a reduction of close to 5 per cent in homicide rates, while the control municipalities showed a combined increase of 22.8 per cent.<sup>37</sup> However, the project had a considerable effect on homicide levels in San Martín but not in Ilopango. This presents the perfect situation for investigating the factors leading to successful GFZs based on the differences in implementation between the two municipalities.

In South Africa, the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone, there is no evidence of direct impact on homicide rates. In all three cases, there were dramatic reductions in homicide rates in the years

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<sup>35</sup> André Villaveces MD, et al. “Effect of a Ban on Carrying Firearms on Homicide Rates in 2 Colombian Cities”, *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 283, no. 9, 1 March 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Jorge A. Restrepo and Edgar Villa, “Do Bans on Carrying Firearms Work for Violence Reduction?”, Department of Economics-Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2011, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> William Godnick, “An Examination of the Impact Of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes on Citizen Security in Latin America”, PhD dissertation, University of Bradford, 2010, p. 171.

following the establishment of GFZs; however, it is not possible to identify firm causal relationships due to a lack of data.

Another important indicator of armed violence is the level of gun injury. In Colombia, a 2010 study finds that when comparing GFZ days in 2009 to the same days in 2003-2008 without GFZ restrictions, GFZ days display a 53 per cent lower rate of hospitalization for gun injury.<sup>38</sup> In El Salvador, hospitalizations for gun injuries dropped substantially in the pilot municipalities, from a combined total of nearly 1,773 to less than 1,268. Conversely, they more than doubled in the control municipalities during the same period (from 585 to 1,248).<sup>39</sup>

Again, the impact on gun-related injuries is difficult to determine in the cases of South Africa, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands. However, testimonial evidence there also suggests that GFZs have a positive impact in reducing the incidence of gun-related injuries. For example, nurses interviewed at a clinic in Fothane, South Africa (where GFZs were widespread), reported a significant reduction in treatment of gunshot wounds.<sup>40</sup>

### **Decreasing number of guns entering GFZs**

In the case of El Salvador, the number of weapons seized by the police during the initial stages of the Gun-Free Municipalities project increased dramatically (102 per cent in Ilopango and 69 per cent in San Martín). Later, the number of weapons confiscated dropped as more people became informed about the local ordinance and police-related activity became more visible. Although police patrols and searches remained constant, the number of weapons confiscated was reduced.<sup>41</sup>

In the South African GFZ evaluation, interviewees and focus group participants claimed that the establishment of GFZs led to a reduction in gun carrying and visible public display of guns. This

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<sup>38</sup> Resptrepo, "Do Bans on Carrying Firearms Work for Violence Reduction?", p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>40</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Adèle Kirsten, 12 June 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Marcella Smutt and Daniel Carsana, 12 June 2012.

response was especially strong in Fothane, where interviewees at all the GFZs evaluated noted they did not recall seeing anyone bring a gun into a GFZ. Students and teachers saw a stark reduction in the amount of other students and teachers bringing guns to school.<sup>42</sup>

### **Changing social norms and attitudes related to guns**

The research conducted on GFZs in three South African towns shows that they were able to challenge societal acceptance of the absence of effective law enforcement. In the case of Fothane, interviews and discussion groups confirmed the existence of a new social norm of not carrying or displaying guns for self-protection in public. Testimonies in interviews and focus groups in Fothane showed feelings that guns were not desirable and that individuals would “feel embarrassed” to carry a gun in public. However, in the larger and more urban townships of Diepkloof and Khayelitsha, GFZs were unable to challenge existing norms to the same extent. This was attributed to the higher-density urban environments, where social cohesion and thus social stigma was weaker.<sup>43</sup> Practitioners that helped implement GFZs in South Africa in the initial days of the movement say that GFZs today have become so normalized, they are now considered mainstream. Although they may not display a GFZ sign, most banks, petrol stations, government buildings and large corporate businesses have GFZ policies.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, in the Solomon Islands, interviews and focus groups revealed that the Weapons Free Village campaign increased the social stigma of possessing weapons and created a positive status for villages without them. A 2004 evaluation of the campaign found that the high status awarded to Weapons Free Villages had encouraged other villages to join and become weapon-free. Evidence of the change in social norms and attitudes towards guns in the Solomon Islands can be seen from the categorical response of participants of a focus group in Guadalcanal that they would “never have guns in their villages again”,<sup>45</sup> to the strong public protest that impeded the reintroduction

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<sup>42</sup> Kirsten, “Islands of safety in a sea of guns”.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Adéle Kirsten, 12 June 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson and Muggah, “Solomon Islands: Evaluating the Weapons Free Village Campaign”.

of an armed guard in the country in 2007 (the police in the Solomon Islands are unarmed since 2003),<sup>46</sup> and to the widespread grass-roots support that the Weapons Free Village campaign enjoyed.<sup>47</sup>

In El Salvador, the percentage of the population stating that carrying firearms in public represented a threat increased from 87 per cent to 91 per cent in pilot municipalities and from 83 per cent to 89 per cent in control municipalities. One can notice that even before the pilot project began, a large majority considered carrying weapons in public spaces to be a threat. Thus, the project seems only to have increased or legitimized a feeling that was already present for the majority of the population. The effect was stronger when survey respondents were asked if “homes should have firearms”. Positive responses decreased in pilot municipalities from 21 per cent to 18 per cent, while staying constant at 20 per cent in control areas.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, 28 per cent of respondents said they had changed their mind about firearm carrying and possession.<sup>49</sup>

### **Improving policing and/or police-community relations**

The strongest evidence of increased policing capacity for arms control comes from the Gun-Free Municipalities project in El Salvador, where police capacity-building was incorporated from the outset. Significant investments of resources, personnel, training and infrastructure were made during the project. In both pilot municipalities, confiscation of weapons and policing activity increased substantially. In addition to monitoring and patrolling gun-free spaces, the national police increased inspections at traffic stops with the added emphasis on confiscating illegal firearms.

In Colombia, in the cities of Cali and Bogotá, the police, during intervention days, established checkpoints throughout the city and increased search and seizure of weapons, including at the entrance

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<sup>46</sup> Philip Alpers, “Guns for the Palace Guard in Honiara: We Should Worry”, *Austral Policy Forum*, Nautilus Institute, Opinion 8, February 2007. Available at: <http://nautilus.rmit.edu.au/forum-reports/0703a-alpers.html>.

<sup>47</sup> LeBrun and Muggah, “Silencing Guns”, p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*

<sup>49</sup> Gómez, Armando Carballido, *Desarmar la violencia: Una década de Prevención de la violencia armada en El Salvador* (San Salvador, UNDP, 2009), p. 42.

of bars and clubs.<sup>50</sup> In Sierra Leone over 35 chiefdoms became weapon-free and engaged in weapons collections co-organized with the Sierra Leone police. Interviewees mentioned that the project helped to build the capacity of the police and the community to rid chiefdoms of weapons and keep them out.<sup>51</sup> Finally, in the case of the Solomon Islands, the weapon-free campaign and the National Peace Council monitors helped to establish relationships of trust between the villagers, the Solomon Islands Police and the regional peacekeepers (RAMSI), who performed police functions.

### **Increasing feelings of security**

Although there was no evidence of a causal relationship between homicide reduction and GFZs in South Africa, the results of interviews and focus groups conducted show an increased perception of security. Interviews revealed that the most frequently noted change across all three towns analysed was a reduction in the number or frequency of gunshots heard.<sup>52</sup> Using the reduced sound of gunshots as an indicator of people's increased sense of security, the evaluation reports that many study participants saw GFZs as a key factor in this change.

The study also revealed that people reported feeling safer inside GFZs than anywhere else. Those interviewed who worked at or frequented clinics, schools and bars declared as GFZs, generally commented on feeling safer because of the GFZ status.<sup>53</sup>

In El Salvador, residents of both pilot and control municipalities were asked about the level of security they felt both in their neighbourhood or community and in specific areas. Actually, the data shows that perceived levels of security decreased during the project and that feelings of security increased only at home. There are several possible explanations for this. Even though homicide levels decreased in San Martín, they still remained relatively high at the end of the project. While actual security had increased, it is not surprising that people did not report feeling comfortable levels of security in the

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<sup>50</sup> Villaveces et al., "Effect of a Ban on Carrying Firearms on Homicide Rates in 2 Colombian Cities", p. 1,206.

<sup>51</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Napoleon Abdulai, 24 July 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Kirsten, "Islands of safety in a sea of guns".

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

public space. Also, perceptions of security are influenced not only by local but also national trends and national news. A national survey in El Salvador shows an increased perception of insecurity around the country in 2006 that may have offset improved local perceptions in pilot municipalities.<sup>54</sup>

### **Reducing demand for and possession of guns**

Although in most cases GFZs changed social norms about carrying, this was not often enough to eliminate demand for guns for self-protection and escalation-dominance.<sup>55</sup>

In South Africa, people reported that while GFZs provided them a safe space, they felt their personal circumstances compelled them to carry a gun. Still others agreed that although GFZs should be respected, there was nothing wrong with having a gun at home.<sup>56</sup>

In El Salvador, where emphasis was put on improved policing and police enforcement of GFZs, a public opinion survey shows a slight reduction in households reporting on owning a gun, from 10 per cent to 7 per cent. The responses in control municipalities remained constant (8 per cent).<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to note that survey results regarding the desire to purchase a firearm<sup>58</sup> increased in pilot municipalities from 11 per cent to 13 per cent (within the margin of error) and control municipalities from 9 per cent to 15 per cent.<sup>59</sup> However, a different study reveals that actual *intent* to purchase decreased from 25 per cent to 19 per cent.<sup>60</sup> Thus, while actual purchases, intentions to purchase and possession all declined, the desire to eventually purchase a weapon remained.

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<sup>54</sup> Godnick, "An Examination of the Impact of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes", p. 176.

<sup>55</sup> See Godnick, 2010; Brauer and Muggah, 2006 and Kirsten, 2008b.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> The survey question asked was "would you like to have a firearm?"

<sup>59</sup> Cano, *¿Vivir sin armas?*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Carlos Umaña, *Impacto del proyecto Municipios Libres de Armas en los municipios de Ilopango y San Martín* (San Salvador, PRODEC, 2007), quoted in Godnick, "An Examination of the Impact of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes", p. 179.

In the Solomon Islands, villagers reported that guns were still being stored within Weapons Free Villages. The collection of 3,700 guns in the 2003 gun amnesty campaign (one year after the initiation of the campaign) was also proof that the weapon-free campaign alone was not able to eliminate demand and possession.<sup>61</sup> However, RAMSI helped to raise the risk of owning a gun by increasing the probability of being caught and increasing levels of perceived security. The revised national legislation on firearms also increased the penalties for those caught with weapons.

There is additional evidence in Sierra Leone that when GFZs are combined with positive collective incentives related to development, they can reduce demand and possession. The DDR processes that helped collect weapons of combatants were followed by the Community Arms Collection and Destruction (CACD) programme, which aimed to collect weapons left over in communities. The original CACD programme used coercion: those who failed to turn in weapons risked prosecution, as firearms possession was declared illegal. However, it was found that the subsequent Arms for Development project was more successful due to its use of positive collective incentives.<sup>62</sup> The positive incentive created a strong social pressure to relinquish possession of weapons.

### **Side benefits of GFZs**

#### **Increasing community cohesion and building confidence**

Apart from the clearly intended impacts mentioned above, there were also a series of unintentional benefits that GFZs were found to produce or enhance. In South Africa, the strongly participatory process provided a forum for communities to discuss broader public security issues, such as improved street lighting, policing and other violence prevention measures.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, in the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone, GFZs played a positive role in building confidence between former combating groups, in reconstructing community relations and in facilitating

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<sup>61</sup> LeBrun and Muggah, “Silencing Guns”, pp. 33-35.

<sup>62</sup> Miller and others, *From Research to Road Map*, p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Interview conducted by Heather Sutton with Adèle Kirsten, 12 June 2012.

reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict. In Sierra Leone, the Arms for Development initiative helped communities come together after so many years of conflict and violence. The initiative promoted working together towards a common goal to address the needs of the community through the exchange of weapons for development projects.<sup>64</sup> In the Solomon Islands, the weapon-free campaign was effective in strengthening relationships and building social capital within and between villages. Furthermore it contributed to building trust and confidence between the National Peace Council monitors and villages. The campaign also reinforced traditional leadership structures by working with chiefs and village authorities.<sup>65</sup>

### Reviewing gun legislation

GFZs affected national legislation in some cases. In South Africa and El Salvador, GFZs actually became a component of national legislation—Firearms Free Zones in South Africa and *vedas de armas* (gun bans) in El Salvador. In these cases, pilot experiences provided evidence of impact and a vehicle for popular mobilization that allowed advocates to pressure for their inclusion in national laws. In South Africa, GFZs were part of a strategy to engage local populations in the wider debate on gun control legislation at the national level. During the development of the Firearms Control Act, many communities contributed to written and oral submissions to the parliamentary portfolio committee. As a result of the high levels of public participation, legislation was able to reflect the interests and concerns of those who had engaged in the GFZ process. In El Salvador the well-documented positive impacts of the Gun-Free Municipalities pilot project helped increase government and popular support for wider-ranging legislative and policy reforms. In Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands, and to some extent in El Salvador, GFZs helped to strengthen enforcement of national laws on possession/carrying at the local level.

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<sup>64</sup> UNDP and Government of Sierra Leone, *Arms for Development Draft Annual Report 2004* (unpublished United Nations document).

<sup>65</sup> Nelson and Muggah, “Solomon Islands: Evaluating the Weapons Free Village Campaign”, p. 28.

## Implementing complementary initiatives

Armed violence is clearly a complex problem affected by a mosaic of social, economic and political factors. Policy targeting armed violence must be equally multi-faceted and integrated into a comprehensive and systemic approach. In this sense, GFZs are only one piece of the puzzle. Throughout the research for this paper it was consistently difficult to isolate the GFZ component from the more comprehensive policies and projects they were generally a part of. The following are some of the initiatives with which GFZs were often combined:

- Wider legislative reforms placing restrictions on purchasing, carrying and possession of guns;
- Improvements in policing capacity and security sector reform;
- Demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants;
- Weapons collections and destruction programmes;
- Improvement in management of government weapons stockpiles;
- Promotion of public occupation and ownership of public spaces (through cultural activities and physical improvements);
- Awareness-raising campaigns;
- Continued research into the dynamics of armed violence.

## V. Lessons learned

The GFZs examined in this study have different characteristics, were created in different circumstances and were implemented in different ways. Their diversity makes it challenging to analyse them in a coherent way. Still, it is precisely this wide, geographical and contextual diversity that makes the collective lessons learnt not irrelevant, as the obstacles to and requirements for success are similar in each case.

***Adequate understanding of the problem and context:*** Knowing the when, where and how of armed violence in a particular area can help to identify prime spots for GFZs and craft their specific characteristics. Locations for GFZs should be determined strategically

by where armed violence is concentrated, where there is sympathetic leadership and where there is a noted desire from the community to increase security. GFZs may achieve greater impact when their locations and operational characteristics are determined through analysis of research and statistics on armed violence. Continued research and monitoring of dynamics of armed violence should determine how GFZs adapt and where there is need to expand or increase enforcement.

***A participatory, inclusive planning process:*** A participatory process generally involves three steps. First, all stakeholders at the national, provincial/district and local levels should be identified. Second, a phase of dialogue and discussion should be conducted with all relevant community representatives and citizen groups in the initial phase before establishing GFZs. Third, the organizational structures behind any GFZ should include representatives of relevant stakeholder groups. Although this was not always the case in all situations examined, Government, civil society and the police should ideally be represented in both the national and local level decision-making structures.

***Limited involvement of national or local authorities:*** A recurring difficulty encountered was a limited involvement of leadership at either the local or national levels. In South Africa, after the new legislation of 2000 incorporated Firearms Free Zones (FFZs), 27 schools underwent preparations to become FFZs but failed to be officially declared so by the Ministry of Safety and Security.<sup>66</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, in El Salvador problems arose at the local level when new mayors, elected halfway through the Gun-Free Municipalities project, did not take ownership of it, leading to implementation difficulties.

***Communication:*** Effective communication begins before a GFZ is declared, through an inclusive consultation and planning process involving users and administrators of GFZ areas. Where this initial discussion with stakeholders is absent, GFZs are less likely to be successful. Similarly, communication must be constant and consistent to always inform new visitors or staff of the GFZ status. Communication is key at every phase in the project. GFZs where

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<sup>66</sup> Kirsten, *A Nation Without Guns?*, p. 172.

no signs are placed or where their maintenance is poor, may not be successful in keeping arms out of their vicinities, in influencing social norms or in increasing feelings of security.

**Importance of enforcing GFZ:** GFZs are weakened when no action is taken if they are violated. Weak enforcement can stem from the lack of laws and legal recourse to prosecute violators, lack of police involvement and/or mandate to enforce them, or a lack of clear procedures for administrators and staff to follow when a violation occurs. In addition, the consequences of violating a GFZ should be clear, standardized across different GFZ locations and enforced. Involving those responsible for GFZ enforcement (i.e. local police, administrators of GFZ venues, local authorities) in the planning process of GFZs can help to ensure effective enforcement and maintenance later on. These stakeholders, especially police, may require training and special resources to adequately enforce GFZs. Finally, considering positive incentives for areas that remain gun-free can greatly enhance GFZ enforcement.

**Lack of resources (human and financial):** Lack of resources is an obstacle to effective GFZ implementation. While GFZs are rather low-cost measures, they do require sufficient resources to ensure the functioning of the organizational structure, the production and dissemination of information, the holding of community discussions, acquisition of enforcement equipment and personnel. In Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands, dwindling financial resources often threatened development projects or the delivery of material incentives to Weapons Free Villages. Therefore, multi-year funding and human resources should be secured from the outset to avoid losing credibility and momentum.

**Complementary initiatives:** GFZs should be implemented together with other complementary gun control, violence reduction and development initiatives. Complementary initiatives, such as improvements in policing capacity, promotion of occupation and ownership of public spaces (through cultural activities and physical improvements), awareness-raising campaigns, collection and destruction programmes, legislative reforms and ongoing research, can help GFZs achieve their desired outcomes and impact.

## VI. Conclusions and implications

GFZs are not a panacea or silver-bullet solution to the problem of armed violence. Under certain conditions they can be effective, especially when combined with other gun control and violence prevention and reduction initiatives. GFZs can positively impact levels of gun homicide and injury, gun carrying, social norms and attitudes towards guns, perceptions of security and gun possession for self-protection.

GFZs do bring something to the table that traditional supply-side gun regulation policies often neglect—influencing feelings of security, social norms and attitudes and directly mobilizing local communities. GFZs can be an effective tool for bridging the gap between the national gun legislation and addressing more immediate, subjective feelings of insecurity at the ground level.

While GFZs can influence some of the factors driving demand for guns, they should not be considered a package solution for stemming demand. GFZs can be effective in making gun carrying for reasons of self-defence and masculine power projection less socially acceptable. However, where individuals still feel that they are not adequately protected by law enforcement, it is unlikely that demand for guns as a means of self-protection can be eliminated. For these reasons, GFZs are ideally an additional tool for change in societies with a recent experience in armed conflict or pervasive lawlessness, but where an understanding is growing that working on security and stability is a shared endeavour at any level.

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