SALW Epidemics in Latin America- A Challenge to Human Security

Ilona Szabó de Carvalho

Introduction

This paper aims to advance discussions on the negative impact of the dissemination of SALW on Human Security and how this concept serves as a tool for approaching new (and longstanding) issues of internal and external security in Latin America, and specifically in the Brazilian context. Part I examines the concept of Human Security, considering its links and practical applications to the problem of armed violence. Human Security-oriented analysis needs to be more clearly focused on armed violence, a growing phenomenon in Latin America and other parts of the Southern hemisphere. Part II presents a short review of the current problem of armed violence in Brazil and introduces a case study of Viva Rio, a NGO that works within the Human Security framework, focusing on its SALW control initiatives and on the developments in the Brazilian Arms Control Legislation. The final section calls for increased cooperation among organizations of civil society, governments and international organizations to disseminate the risks of SALW and advocate for its effective control, under the conceptual repertoire of Human Security.

PART I

Human Security

The term ‘Human Security’ first came to prominence with the publication of the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report. Before that, an early definition would introduce

---

1 Coordinator of the Human Security Program of Viva Rio, Master in International Studies, University of Uppsala – Sweden, Specialist in Public Policy Analysis and International Development Studies. (ilona@vivario.org.br, ilonaszabo@yahoo.com).

the concept in the global policy debate with Lincoln Chen’s report (of) the Common Security Forum in 1992. Like most attempts to conceptualize this somewhat elusive idea, the UNDP definition focused on a broad range of threats (economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political) to individuals. Traditional security concepts, in contrast, focus on a narrow range of external (military) threats to the territorial and political integrity of states. In fact we are now dealing with new scales of security that face not only the security issues linked with the territory and nation but also with its population and individuals. From a social theory standpoint, that does not mean we are changing from a macro scale point of view to a micro scale point of view. The complexity of the idea of security from a human perspective incorporates the unpredictability of social events that does not subordinate the “simple” to the “complex”, or the “small” to the “large”. It is more interesting to deal with an alternative “order of perception” that recognizes the configurations of events as isomorphic in the sense that social events can be regarded as equally complex despite their recognition as micro or macro insertion.

Currently, support for the concept of Human Security stems mainly from the fact that much of today’s physical insecurity derives from armed conflicts that take place within national boundaries, rather than from wars between states. These may take the form of civil wars or less clearly-defined clashes between armed gangs or terrorist groups, sometimes supported directly or indirectly by states with a weak commitment to human rights. Ironically this scale change on security affairs did not made the issue simpler. On the contrary, the multiplicity of causes and consequent possibilities to deal with them make this new scenario seem as complex as the traditional “large” inter-state Cold War era security affairs.

---


5 For this conception of isomorphism in social theory see Casper B. Jensen. Infrastructural fractals: revisiting the micro-macro distinction in social theory.(available at http://abaete.wikia.com/ at 03/27/06)
The concept of Human Security is innovative due to its emphasis on guaranteeing individual security, focusing on individual protection and empowerment, approaching its development and ensuring its rights. The protection of Human Security is considered the principal task of international order, even if this means countering the will of the states, which are mentioned as one of the main sources of individual insecurity. The people-centred approach is the main contribution of this concept. As state security has long meant protecting territorial boundaries and institutions, threats to individual security include threats that have not been classified as such to state security. The concept offers the possibility of exploring international and domestic aspects of security issues. However, in spite of its focus on individuals, Human Security can not be considered in isolation, but must take into account the institutional frameworks, in particular nation states that uphold or infringe human rights. The notion of Human Security is therefore inextricable from creating and or strengthening democratic institutions.

Human Security promotes new forms of multilateralism by taking away the longstanding exclusive emphasis on sovereign nation-states. No longer are states the sole actors. The emergence of new stake-holders in the debate is vital for the concept’s dissemination and legitimacy. Today regional and international organizations, and non-governmental actors, in particular NGOs, play a central role in the Human Security debate.⁶

Thus, just as there are different actors, there are also several different views of Human Security circulating in the international scene. The Human Security Commission – presided over by Sadako Ogasa and Amartya Sen – proposes a broad definition of Human Security. According to the Commission, Human Security is a concept that addresses both "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want", the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and fulfillment”⁷.

The Human Security Network, composed of 14 member nations, states that Human Security has become both a new measure of global security and part of a new agenda for

---


global action. Safety is the hallmark of freedom from fear, while well-being is the aim of freedom from want. “In essence, Human Security means freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, their safety or even their lives”. Human Security and human development are thus two sides of the same coin, mutually reinforcing and leading to a conducive environment for each other.\(^8\)

The EU High Representative for Common Policy and Security Policy presents a more precise strategic focus\(^9\) based on the diagnosis that inter-state conflicts have decreased while new dangers related to “…lawlessness, impoverishment, exclusivist ideologies and the daily use of violence”\(^10\) have gained prominence. Hence, the five key threats to Europe are: “…terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing states, and organized crime.”\(^11\) The main sources of these threats are authoritarian states with repressive policies and failed states that shelter state and non-state sponsored armed groups. The EU High Representative proposes to advance a clear legal framework for justified interventions. It also calls for operations on the ground that are based on the principles of human rights, clear political authority, multilateralism, bottom-up approaches, regional focus, the use of legal instruments, and the appropriate use of force.

Despite the different definitions, the outstanding contribution of the Human Security approach is to interrelate security and development issues without reducing one to the other. A security agenda that is insensitive to issues of global and national inequality, epidemics, environmental degradation, the frustration of expectations and relative deprivation, will be condemned to fighting a war against symptoms. Therefore, though the contemporary security agenda from a human perspective is not a synonym for the human development agenda, the two are nevertheless somewhat inseparable.

---

\(^9\) *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*, The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe’s Security Capabilities, Presented to EU High Representative for Common Policy and Security Policy Javier Solana, Barcelona, September 15, 2004. Although the report is more detailed, it is unclear in its definition of what should be included within the notion of insecurity. In page 8 it mentions to food, housing and health as possible candidates to be included in their definition of Human Security, although also indicating that “…their legal status is less elevated.”
\(^10\) Ibid. p. 7.
On the other hand, Human Security remains a contested concept, and one that has yet to make much impact in the field of international relations (IR), or security studies. The international relations bibliography criticizes the concept of Human Security by stating that it does not incorporate the notion of power or the political institutions that are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of human rights, (including repression whenever necessary.)? It further accuses the Human Security concept of diluting the specific problem of controlling physical violence in an agenda that, ultimately, includes every possible source of insecurity, leading to a confusion of different causal factors. This discussion will be addressed further ahead in this paper.

However, we need not adopt the concept of ‘Human Security’ in its entirety, in order to support what is perhaps the concept’s single most important contribution to contemporary academic security studies, namely the designation of the individual, rather than the state, as the referent object of security. It is, in practice, necessary to look for a Human Security agenda built from the ground up, from the local towards the global instead of the current tendency to produce global concepts and apply locally to national situations.

**Human Security - a Latin American Perspective:**

Today, the nature of conflicts around the world are changing: the greatest security threats no longer come from inter-state conflicts but from a new form of high-intensity violence in which the main ‘battlegrounds’ are urban centers, and ‘combatants’ are generally young, poor, and socially marginalized men. Latin America is perhaps the region that best illustrates this shift and the range of related security problems, including: weak public institutions; ineffective, corrupt, and violent policing; extremely high levels of interpersonal and especially gang-related violence in the context of drug trafficking and other criminal activities; the proliferation of guns; machismo or male chauvinism, and its associations with violence and repercussions in violence against women and the lack of effective violence diffusing strategies.

12 See various contributions in Jean-Francois Rioux (ed.), *La Sécurité Humaine*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2001
An operational and analytically relevant concept of Human Security should provide a clearer definition of the concept of ‘insecurity’ so as to better address the new range of threats described above.

The core concept of Human Security should be the protection from organized or uncontrolled armed violence that is capable of threatening: 1) the stability of local democratic institutions, and/or 2) the physical safety of the population. Hence, humanitarian crises related to famine, health epidemics, or natural or ecological disasters would not be included in a more focused concept of Human Security, (in the scope of this paper). That is to say that this present analysis differentiates between humanitarian (or ecological or health epidemic) crises and destruction produced by intentional human violence.

The Latin American Context

Latin America is the region of the world with the lowest levels of armed conflicts between states and the lowest military expenditures in relation to GNP. The region has consolidated borders, and for the most part is devoid of intra-religious conflicts and marked ethnic hatred. Latin America is the only region in the world in which all countries adhered to an anti-nuclear weapons treaty.

Despite all that, Latin America is the region with the highest rates of armed violence, a region in which, with the exception of Colombia and Haiti, there are no officially recognized armed conflicts.

According to various international reports, Latin America has the highest rates of gun violence and gun-related deaths of any region in the world\(^\text{13}\); it accounts for 42% of the world’s total number of homicides by fire arms. Hence, one may say that the real forgotten conflicts today are those that have not been officially recognized.

This region clearly represents the dynamics of the worldwide shift from open conflict to informal but statistically significant armed struggles referred as urban violence – and

\(^{13}\text{Latin America has the highest homicide rate among young people between ten and twenty-nine years of age, at 36.5 per 100 000: World Health Organization (2002). With an average of 16 homicides per 100,000 residents, the Latin America and Caribbean region has the highest rate of gun violence in the world: Small Arms Survey (2003).}\)
highlight the continued risks faced by both men and women in a context that cannot be accurately described as war or peace\textsuperscript{14} and started to be addressed as “newest wars”\textsuperscript{15}. Nevertheless the challenges posed to the region are very similar to those emerging in postconflict scenarios in Africa, Asia and the Balkans. That is to say that ineffective or weak public security institutions, increasing youth involvement in gang-related violence in the context of drug trafficking and other criminal activities, the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, among other factors, are common to many nations in the Southern hemisphere and to a lesser degree, in specific countries in the Northern hemisphere as well.

This new environment demands new approaches, which seek to address the multiple factors underlying insecurity; it also calls for integrated policies and actions that address security issues, while at the same time respecting human rights and developmental needs. Human Security does provide a different outlook and set of tools to better address this new reality. It is therefore crucial that the concept gain support and serve as a base for a new international/regional agenda.

\textbf{PART II}

\textbf{Human Insecurity in Brazil – Focusing on Armed Violence}

In 2002, 38,088 people in Brazil were killed by firearms – the highest recorded rate of any country in the world, including countries at war. This statistic reveals that urban violence is clearly one of the most pressing development, security, and health issues facing the country today, even though as a phenomenon, it is a quite recent, starting in the eighties and acquiring alarming proportions during the nineties.

\textsuperscript{14} Dowdney, Luke. \textit{Neither War nor Peace, international comparisons of children and youth in organised armed violence}, 2005. Viva Rio, ISER and IANSA. Comparative study on children and organized armed violence in 10 countries, including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Philippines, South Africa and USA.
\textsuperscript{15} Moura, T. \textit{Newest wars, newest peaces}. Conceptual and political challenges. VIII Congresso Luso-Afro-Brasileiro de Ciências Sociais. Lisboa, 2004
The urban aspect of armed violence and its high mortality and morbidity rates were highlighted in detail by a public health perspective of social violence\textsuperscript{16}. Without neglecting structural aspects of violence, created by different modes of oppression induced by specific economic, cultural and political systems, social sciences experts acknowledge that the armed violence related to socially recognized outlaw actions has become an urgent issue of the political agenda. The population’s well-being and basic rights are continuously threatened by a crescent conflict involving each time a higher incidence of firearms. The mortality rate increased from 2\% in 1930 to 15\% in the 90’s, firearms appearing, behind cardiovascular disease, as the second most common cause of death in Brazil.\textsuperscript{17}.

Official health data shows that the risk of gun related deaths in Brazil is 2.6 times higher than in the rest of the world, and the great majority of these deaths (90\%) are homicides. Furthermore, gun violence rates have tripled in the past twenty years, from 7.2 per 100,000 residents in 1982 to 21.2 per 100,000 residents in 2002 (Graph 1).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Graph_1.png}
\caption{Timeline of Firearm Death Rate in Brazil}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{16} The urban aspect of armed violence derives from the fact that its lethality is concentrated in Brazil Metropolitan Regions.

\textsuperscript{17} Minayo. M.C.S. Social Violence from a Public Health Perspective. Cad. Saúde Publ., Rio de Janeiro, 10 (supplement 1):07-18, 1994
Although public insecurity has been a growing concern in Brazil since the ‘80s, civil society groups have focused specifically on guns and gun violence for just over a decade, from around the mid-nineties. Activists have used public health data from the outset, and have also adopted public health terminology: guns came to be seen as a “vector” of the “epidemic” of violence, making it more lethal and prolific.

The public health approach also allowed policy-makers, activists and researchers to begin to characterize the impact of gun violence and unpack the different ways that different segments of the population are affected by the problem. As elsewhere in the world, the vast majority of deaths and injuries affect men, and especially young, poorer men.

In Brazil, the risk of being killed by firearms for young men between 20 and 29 years of age is five times higher than for the rest of the population, and two times higher than for the rest of the male population. The risk of death for these young men is 38 times higher than that of the female population and 20 times higher when compared to the female population of the same age group. (Graph 2). The data makes it very evident
that gun violence is a serious problem that will have an important demographic impact in the future if allowed to continue unchecked.

Among adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age that died in 2002, 39.1% were killed by guns (Graph 3).

In nine state capitals in Brazil, guns were responsible for over half of the externally caused deaths in this age group: Vitória (70%), Recife (63%), Rio de Janeiro (58%), Salvador (58%), Belo Horizonte (58%), Maceió (54%), Cuiabá (53%), Florianópolis (53%), and João Pessoa (51%).

Although the number of women killed by firearms is low compared to that of men, guns are used in 42.4% of homicides against women. And despite the fact that guns are more regularly used for and by men, women, too, suffer the losses and consequences they bring – they are widowed, orphaned, left without siblings or children. Fear, insecurity, anger, and financial difficulties are all part of the legacy left by the deaths and/or incapacitating injuries caused by guns. Furthermore, even when a gun it is not fired, it can be used to threaten and intimidate women, particularly in situations of domestic violence. A rapid analysis of women who denounced domestic abuse at eight of the nine Delegacias da Mulher in the Rio de Janeiro\(^\text{18}\) found that, among women who

\(^{18}\) Research developed between September 12 and October 13 2005; during this month, questionnaires to be filled by victims were distributed at eight DEAMs of Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area: Belford
responded that their abuser had a gun at home: 75.6% said the accused threatened them; 73% said that the presence of a gun stopped them from verbally or physically responding to violence; and 68% said that they wanted to break off their relation with the accused but did not do so because they feared retaliation with the gun. In order to fully understand the specific impact of gun violence on women, it is important to complement health data with additional qualitative studies and other approaches to information-gathering.  

The lack of perspective for personal, professional and social status – the impossibility of having dreams and making them come true – generates a feeling of impotence and low self-esteem, mainly among young men, who may resort to armed violence to express these frustrations. If it were possible to measure the value of a life, certainly in Brazil it would be inversely related to the firearms-related death rates. Life expectancy among youth falls in tandem with lowered life expectations. The availability and misuse of firearms, as an alternative to impotence, are part of the reasons behind this extremely worrying situation.

One of the main firearms events in contemporary Brazil is led by young, poor and black men fighting as criminal groups against competitors in drug trafficking business or with the state police force. Rio de Janeiro is a notorious example of these new social conflicts’ spaces. As an empirical phenomenon, armed urban conflicts can be described as violent armed struggles between different groups in specific spaces of the urban tissue.

It is well known that the emergence of conspicuous armed conflicts in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro and other big urban centers in Brazil in the eighties coincided with the organization of an informal criminal economic activity in Latin America and overseas that constituted maybe the first true form of economic integration in the

Roxo, Campo Grande, Caxias, Centro, Jacarepaguá, Niterói, Nova Iguaçu and São Gonçalo. We obtained answers to 615 questionnaires. Conclusions will be published on August, 2006 as part of a joint Viva Rio and University of Coimbra research called “Women and Girls in Contexts of Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro”, by Jessica Galeria and Tatiana Moura.

An 18-month research-action project “Women and Girls in Contexts of Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro”, a partnership between the Rio-based NGO and the Peace Studies Group at the University of Coimbra in Portugal and supported by the Ford Foundation, aims to fill this gap. Results will be
continent: the production, processing, and international distribution of cocaine. This economic activity concentrated in areas where public services were absent during authoritarian period and, even after that, (it) delayed to establish inclusive policies for lower classes sectors of population. The common perception of city inhabitants was that the only way the state marked its presence within squatter populations in favela areas were with its repressive forces.

From the traditional National State perspective, armed violence appears in political theory as in the context of revolution, guerrilla and civil war. However, in the urban armed conflicts in the main Brazilian cities, the law is being broken by armed groups but different from guerrillas that affront government and seek to overthrow the state and proclaim itself legislator on behalf of justice, the agents of these new urban armed conflicts affront power on behalf of drug trafficking businesses, of a symbolic affirmation and “social delinquent insertion”. Civil war in international politics differs from popular violence such as protests and riots. A civil war for international organizations like the World Bank “occurs when an identifiable rebel organization challenges the government militarily and the resulting violence results in more than 1,000 combat-related deaths, with at least 5 percent on each side”.

The design of newest forms of war has some distinguishable features as mapped by COAV Research, such as elements of a command structure and power over territory, local population or resources.

It is clear that the new conflict situation that emerges in the world, and which Brazil’s low intensity territorial armed conflicts are part of, elicits a human perspective approach. The military solution seems outdated, since no enemies of national security are present, but a subtle dialectics where usually the perpetrator of criminal violence can be, at the same time, a victim and symptom of a structural violence situation. How to maintain social order by building social binds and not destroying them, when new forms of organized violence blur the limits between war, crime and human rights violations?

published by August, 2006. More information on the project can be obtained by writing jessica@vivario.org.br


The Human Security perspective serves as a path to build new alternatives for these new challenges and offers tools to grass-root mobilization and experimentation done by NGO’s and other civil society actors, which are trying to find solutions to these new set of challenges.

**The NGO Viva Río and its work to promote Arms Control**

The NGO Viva Rio was born as a social movement in response to the massacres of July and August, 1993, which took the lives of eight street kids on the steps of the Candelária church in the center of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and 22 residents of the Vigario Geral favela.

Viva Rio’s main goal is to promote peace and development at the local level, creating means of overcoming urban armed violence and social exclusion. Viva Rio relies on the idea of Human Security as a guiding concept. It is believed that “development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing”\(^\text{23}\).

Viva Rio’s purpose is to research, design and test specific solutions that effectively deal with the complex set of problems at stake.

Using a public health approach to violence, Viva Rio developed a diagnosis of the urban armed violence epidemic in Latin America. Through this analysis, Viva Rio identified four core aspects:

- **Risk Group**: Youth is the main risk group for armed violence in Brazil and other Latin American countries. The group is mainly composed of poor teenagers and young males (15 to 24 years of age) that have dropped out of school before completing elementary education. They are the main authors and victims of armed violence.

- **Vector**: The main vector for the urban violence epidemics in the region is the small arm and light weapon (SALW). Most homicides are committed with the use of firearms. Heavily armed non state actors undermine democracy and civic culture at grassroots level, particularly in poor neighborhoods.

---

\(^{23}\) 2005 World Summit Outcome, UN General Assembly A/60/1.1
- **Critical Areas**: The critical areas are *favelas* and urban peripheries, notorious for the lack of public services, and lack of (investment in) human social and economic capital. A chaotic urbanization process aggravates the problem.

- **Security Sector Reform**: the Security Sector Reform is critical for efficiency, as well as for integrating security, human rights and development goals.

Under this rationale, Viva Rio has developed and consolidated a broad set of actions and strategies specifically oriented around those issues. Actions have ranged from projects aiming at the reduction of supply and demand of SALW, to police training and reform, income generation and education programs aimed at youth at risk, SALW control campaigns, and conflict mediation centers, among others.

**Thematic Focus**

Within a Human Security perspective, Viva Rio’s projects and actions focus on three key themes:

(i) **Youth at Risk**, with specific gender-oriented approaches to armed violence;
(ii) **Security Sector Reform** (SSR);
(iii) **Small Arms and Light Weapons** (SALW) Control;

This paper will explore the SALW initiatives of Viva Rio and the progress and results of SALW control in Brazil.

**SALW Control**

Viva Rio’s SALW control project concentrates its work on three objectives:

1) To reduce the **demand** for guns - actions to sensitize civil society to the risks involved with using or carrying firearms and to respond to the gun industry lobby;

---

24 More information can be found at [www.comunidadsegura.org](http://www.comunidadsegura.org) and [www.vivario.org.br](http://www.vivario.org.br)
2) To reduce the **supply** of guns - curb illicit arms trafficking and control the production, sales, exports and imports of small arms and ammunition; and

3) To improve **stockpile** controls - destruction of guns surplus, improvement of secure storage facilities, voluntary small arms collection campaigns.

In 1995, the organization’s first disarmament campaign was launched—Disarm Yourself—which was also the first campaign of this nature carried out in Brazil. Parallel to these campaigns, the institution, in conjunction with ISER (Institute for Religious Studies), began to conduct research about firearms and their victims, aiming to inform the media and support the advocacy action which resulted in the passing by the Congress of the Disarmament Statute on December 22, 2003.

---

**BOX – The Disarmament Statute in Brazil – Main Articles**

- It is illegal for civilians to carry firearms;
- The control of arms and ammunition is centralized;
- All ammunition sold to public security forces is marked;
- Illegally carrying firearms is an unnegotiable crime resulting in a sentence of 2-6 years;
- The minimum age required to purchase a firearm is 25 years;
  - Testing for psychological stability and knowledge of firearm-use are necessary for the purchase of all firearms;
- The possession of firearms is restricted to the home and workplace;
- All arms, including unregistered and confiscated weapons, can be voluntarily ceded.

The statute also called for a popular referendum to decide whether the sale of arms and ammunition should be prohibited in Brazil.

With the passing of the Disarmament Statute, Viva Rio oriented its work around the supervision of the regulation and implementation of the new law, with specific emphasis on two points: the Campaign for the Voluntary Collection of Arms (CEVA) and the

---

25 Some of the particularly significant achievements in the mobilization of public opinion were: in 1999, a petition was generated with 1,312,929 signatures of support for the prohibition of the sale of arms in the country, which resulted in a state law to prohibit this commerce in Rio de Janeiro, later defeated by the Federal Supreme Court; in 2001, with the support of the state government of Rio de Janeiro, 100,000 weapons, which were linked to crimes and being held in police reserves following confiscation, were destroyed; in 2003, the “Brazil without Arms” march united 50,000 people on Rio de Janeiro waterfront to pressure the passing of the Disarmament Statute which was at the time paralyzed in Congress.
Campaign for the Referendum, which the law aimed to carry out on October 25, 2005, but specified neither the date nor the rules for voting.

Beginning on July 15, 2004, the CEVA provided amnesty to those who ceded any kind of arms—registered or not, of legal or restricted use—and went on to compensate those who turned in arms a sum ranging from $40-$120 (U$D), depending on the caliber of the weapon. Viva Rio participated in the campaign’s National Committee, along with the Minister of Justice and the Federal Police, hosting on its premises the country’s first civilian post for the collection of arms. At this site, Viva Rio instituted the practice of “marretada,” in which ceded arms were smashed with a hammer upon cession; this practice was what gave credibility to the campaign and was later disseminated to all civilian posts across the country.

BOX CEVA

How did it work?

- **Amnesty**: anyone could hand in a registered, non-registered, or illegal gun, and receive a financial compensation. The original deadline of 6 months was extended to 1 year, until the 23d of June, 2005, and then again to the Referendum date – October 23, 2005.

- **Anonymity**: no questions were asked by the police

- **Reimbursement**: from R$ 100 to R$ 300 (US$ 30 to US$ 100), depending on the caliber of the gun, to be paid in 30 days.

- **Destruction**: guns were destroyed by the army 48 hours after they got through legal ballistics exam. At Viva Rio’s collection posts, guns were smashed on the spot with a hammer, after having been carefully classified and registered.

Where?

- Federal Police Stations, Civil Police Stations, Army Headquarters.

- **Civil Society Posts**: Viva Rio had an agreement with the Federal, Civilian and Military Police and has received guns since the 4th of August, 2004 in its headquarters and in partnership with other organizations, especially churches. In total, Viva Rio had 59 collection posts and two mobile units, which visited different neighborhoods in Rio, its metropolitan region and other regions within the state.
The original goal to collect 80,000 arms in the course of six months was surpassed in the second month, and in light of these promising results, the campaign was prolonged until June 23rd, and later October 23rd, 2005, the date eventually set for the referendum. During this period, the NGO opened 59 civilian posts and 2 mobile posts for arms-collection in association with churches and other civil society institutions in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The organization also systematized its experience with the campaign in a manual of procedures and carried out volunteer and police training in nearly all states of the country, articulating a network of organizations in civil society to function as arms-collection posts. At the end of the campaign, a total of 459,855 arms were collected and destroyed throughout Brazil.

As surprising as the success of the CEVA, were the first sets of data released by the Brazilian Ministry of Health in August of 2005, which indicated the positive effect of the new law on the rates of armed violence in Brazil. With the new law that prohibited civilians from carrying arms, and the support of the population for the Voluntary Collection of Arms Campaign, the year of 2004 was the first since 1992, in which deaths by firearms in the country decreased. In 2003, 39,325 people were killed by firearms; in 2004 this number fell to 36,091, a decrease of 8.2%. For disarmament militants and specialists alike, at least 3,234 lives were ‘saved’ thanks to the statute.

Beyond the direct impact manifested in the reduction of deaths by firearms in the country, banning civilians from carrying firearms has assisted police in their work. Prior to the new law, police officials were often unable to obtain sufficient evidence to detain suspects of crimes who were not caught during the course of the given incident. Today criminals can be detained first for illegally carrying firearms, and police can then carry out investigations to uncover evidence of crimes committed.

This data, along with other reports related to public health, criminality, the origin of arms, and motives behind homicides—all of which derived from years of research by appropriate institutions—was used at length in the campaign for the prohibition of the sale of firearms in Brazil. However, as convincing as these statistics and reports were,
they were not enough to convince the population, as they contradicted dominant perceptions of security and reality.26

It is important to reiterate that the result of the Referendum did not inhibit the implementation of other articles of the Disarmament Statute. On the contrary, the message given by the population that voted against the prohibition of the sale of arms to civilians, was that public security is a fundamental and urgent issue, and that the government must do its part so that the citizen can in turn do his. As the other 34 articles of the Disarmament Statute were not linked to the Referendum, they are now being implemented and serve as a model for arms legislation reforms in various countries in the southern hemisphere, including Argentina, Uruguay, and others.

Conclusion

The control of arms is not the only solution to the problem of violence, which stems from many causes, but nevertheless it is a good and important first step.

There are various factors which provoke and contribute to violence (social inequality, the quality of the urban environment, the lack of efficiency in the justice and public security systems, etc.), but with the reduction of the circulation of arms in our society, it will be possible to reduce the number of lives lost due to trivial motives, accidents, and suicides by firearms, as well as the numbers of arms stolen and/or deviated to criminals.

The risks resulting from the possession, carrying, and misuse of firearms need to be disseminated ever more, so that citizens both demand and support efforts by their government to control arms.

Restricting possession and banning civilians from carrying firearms, we could turn what is today a homicide into a mere aggression. Thousands of lives can be saved every year.

26 The Referendum brought 78% of the 122,042,615 eligible Brazilian voters to the poles. Among these, 64% voted NO – against the prohibition on the sale of arms to civilians, and 36% YES – in favour of the prohibition.
In this sense, the conceptual repertoire of Human Security, as a democratic perspective for overcoming urban violence, certainly represents a powerful point of departure for orienting the work of governments, international and regional organizations, and NGO’s. It provides a globally shared language, still in development, and allows for serious on-the-ground initiatives to dialogue with international efforts to overcome the new threats to peace and to reduce the dissemination of SALW.