

Small Arms and Tourism

Small arms can hinder or prevent tourism because:

- **Fear of conflict or crime-related gun violence keeps tourists from traveling to certain destinations**
- **Tourist sites are sometimes damaged or rendered inaccessible by ongoing hostilities**
- **Foreign tourists are sometimes expressly targeted in armed attacks**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and a leading source of revenue for many developing countries. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is among the top five “exports” for 83 percent of countries, and the main source of foreign exchange earnings for 38 percent of countries. Tourism has one of the highest rates of job creation, both directly within the industry and in related areas, accounting for nearly 200 million jobs, and over 40 percent of GDP in small island economies and developing countries. Tourism also helps bring in foreign currency, providing a more consistent source of income than exports like coffee or other primary goods. Yet the dangers associated with the proliferation of small arms may drive tourists away, often from the countries most dependent on tourism as a source of revenue. Violence in several African states, for example, reduced tourism by one-third to one-half in the late 1990s.

The outbreak of conflict or insurgent activity will drive even the most adventurous travelers away from traditional tourist havens. Southern Mexico, Indonesia, and the Philippines are among the many locations that have seen a drop in tourism due to localized hostilities. The impact of rebel groups’ activities may directly impact specific tourist sites, such as in Kenya, where bandit groups use animal reserves as their bases of operations. The high levels of gun

violence associated with crime in post-conflict societies also keep tourists from visiting previous vacation destinations. For example, Guatemala and El Salvador have only recently seen tourism rise significantly, even though their internal conflicts ended years ago. Recent political instability and related violence in 2000 led to mass cancellations of trips to places like Israel and Zimbabwe. In all of these countries, small arms are the weapons most commonly used to cause the instability and violence that drive away tourists.

In several recent cases, armed groups have targeted tourists in order to disrupt an industry that provides much needed income to the governments that they oppose. When 62 people were gunned down by members of the Islamic Group in Luxor, Egypt in November 1997, the militant group achieved some of its goals: the attack brought on a sharp decrease in tourism in Egypt and a subsequent decline in GDP growth for the country in 1998. In another example, Muslim separatists based in the Philippines have kidnapped tourists there and in Malaysia to make demands on both Manila and the tourists’ home states.