

## FOREWORD

WHEN, FOR THE first time before a United States audience, I expressed the idea that exporting arms to developing countries is comparable to shipping drugs to industrialized countries, there were reactions of discomfort and rejection. From my point of view, both the arms trade and drug trafficking constitute a sinister *quid pro quo* in a market of death and suffering for millions of human beings. On our continent, the heart of this market lies in the uninterrupted displacement of thousands of kilograms of cocaine to the north and thousands of weapons to the south.

Nevertheless, for many the correlation between the arms trade and drug trafficking is invalid because, although the final results are the same—death, suffering and misery, the two differ in that the sale of drugs is illegal, while that of arms is usually legal. In countries that produce and export arms, the power and influence of arms traffickers is public and respectable; in countries that produce and export drugs, the power and influence of drugs traffickers is considered criminal and immoral.

For Latin America, the effects of arms trafficking could not be more lethal. Weapons feed violence in all forms: military, political, and criminal. Even worse, weapons cause many governments to neglect the most basic needs of their populations: arms budgets divert a great deal of resources that, otherwise, would be dedicated to improving health, education, and housing, to mention only a few needs.

The initial observation of this excellent work by Michael Klare and David Andersen is significant: if Latin America as a buyer and as a vendor accounts for a relatively small portion of the arms market (in dollar terms), it is because its primary acquisitions and sales are concentrated in light-weight weapons. All studies indicate that, in both the military and criminal sphere, the greatest percentage of violent deaths occur from the use of light weapons and small arms. Subsequently, the impact of the sale of these weapons in Latin America is greater than can be deduced from the relative size of the military budgets in this region.

For this reason, it is an honor to present this short preamble to *A Scourge of Guns*, which offers important testimony in a concise, professional, and convincing manner. As a Latin American worried by the increase of violence in our region, I thank and congratulate my friend Lora Lumpe and the Federation of American Scientists for publishing this book, and I urge them to continue to monitor and denounce the deadly sale of weapons.

—Oscar Arias Sánchez  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
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