



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

8th Dialogue on Science – October 14 – 16, 2009
in Engelberg, Switzerland

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Armed Violence and Development – current challenges and a blueprint for action

Armed violence is a source of great human suffering. It uproots communities, destabilizes societies, injures several hundred thousand people every year and globally represents the fourth leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 44. While armed violence is often associated with armed conflict, most deaths from armed violence actually occur outside of conflict settings. Furthermore, according to recent studies, low and medium-income countries suffer from higher rates of fatal and non-fatal injuries than more developed countries.

There is growing international awareness that armed violence is both cause and consequence of underdevelopment: it constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development and ultimately the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition to human suffering and socio-cultural traumata, armed violence produces significant economic costs. These costs range from those associated with death, injury and damage to property, through the increased burden on the law enforcement and justice sector, to the disruption of social services, economic opportunities and the undermining of governance structures. At the same time, the context of underdevelopment may itself be conducive to armed violence and conflict. The international community is increasingly convinced that a holistic approach and decisive action are crucial to meet the challenges that armed violence poses to sustainable development.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, a diplomatic initiative launched in 2006 by Switzerland together with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), aims at better addressing the negative spiral between armed violence and underdevelopment. Its goal is to achieve measurable reductions of armed violence worldwide by 2015 through awareness raising and concrete programmes in some of the world's most affected regions.