

## Press Release

### *COMPREHENSIVE THREE-YEAR STUDY SHOWS SURPRISING EVIDENCE OF MAJOR DECLINES IN ARMED CONFLICTS, GENOCIDES, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE, MILITARY COUPS AND INTERNATIONAL CRISES, WORLDWIDE.*

The Number of Armed Conflicts Has Dropped 40% since 1992.

This Unheralded Decline Is Linked to a Dramatic Increase in UN Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Efforts.

NEW YORK, October 17, 2005—Confounding conventional wisdom, a major new report reveals that all forms of political violence, except international terrorism, have declined worldwide since the early 1990s.

Supported by five governments, published by Oxford University Press and released today, the *Human Security Report* is the most comprehensive annual survey of trends in warfare, genocide, and human rights abuses. The *Report*, which was produced by the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia, shows how, after nearly five decades of inexorable increase, the number of genocides and violent conflicts dropped rapidly in the wake of the Cold War. It also reveals that wars are not only far less frequent today, but are also far less deadly.

In tracking and analyzing these trends the *Report* draws on specially commissioned studies and confirms the little-publicized findings of earlier research to explode a number of widely believed myths about contemporary political violence. The latter include claims that terrorism is currently the gravest threat to international security, that 90% of those killed in today's wars are civilians and that women are disproportionately victimized by armed conflict.

Analyzing the causes of the improvement in global security since the early 1990s, the *Report* argues that the UN played a critically important role in spearheading a huge upsurge of international conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace building activities.

Although marred by much-publicized failures, these efforts have been the major driver of the reduction in war numbers around the world. The *Report* examines alternative explanations for the decline and finds them wanting.

Professor Andrew Mack, who directed the *Report* project, says that these extraordinary changes have attracted little discussion because so few realize that they have taken place. 'No international agency collects data on wars, genocides, terrorist acts, or core human rights abuses,' he said. 'The issues are just too politically sensitive. And ignorance is compounded by the fact that the global media give far

more coverage to wars that start than those that quietly end.'

## KEY FINDINGS

### *Patterns of Political Violence Have Changed*

- ❑ The number of armed conflicts has declined by more than 40% since 1992. The deadliest conflicts (those with 1000 or more battle-deaths) dropped even more dramatically—by 80%.
- ❑ The number of international crises, often harbingers of war, fell by more than 70% between 1981 and 2001.
- ❑ Wars between countries are more rare than in previous eras and now constitute less than 5% of all armed conflicts.
- ❑ The number of military coups and attempted coups has declined by some 60% since 1963. In 1963, there were 25 coups or attempted coups; in 2004, there were 10. All failed.
- ❑ Most armed conflicts now take place in the poorest countries in the world, but as incomes rise the risk of war declines.
- ❑ The period since the end of World War II is the longest interval without wars between the major powers in hundreds of years.
- ❑ The UK and France, followed by the US and Russia/USSR have fought most international wars since 1946.
- ❑ Burma and India have suffered the greatest number of 'conflict-years' since 1946. (If a country fights two separate wars in one calendar year this counts as two 'conflict-years'.) In 2003, India suffered more 'conflict-years' than any other country in the world.
- ❑ Most of the world's conflicts are now concentrated in Africa. But even here there are signs of hope. A new dataset compiled for the *Human Security Report* finds that between 2002 and 2003 (the last year for which there is data) the number of armed conflicts in Africa dropped from 41 to 35.
- ❑ The drop in armed conflicts in the 1990s was associated with a worldwide decline in arms transfers, military spending and troop numbers.
- ❑ Wars have become dramatically less deadly over the past five decades. The average number of people reported killed per conflict per year in 1950 was 38,000; in 2002 it was just 600—a decline of 98%.
- ❑ In the 1950s, '60s and '70s by far the highest battle—death tolls in the world were in the wars in East and Southeast Asia. In the 1970s and 1980s, most of the killing took place in the Middle East, Central and South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of the 1990s, more people were being killed in sub-Saharan Africa's wars than the rest of the world put together.



- ❑ The new dataset created for the *Report* finds that between 2002 and 2003 the number of reported deaths from all forms of political violence fell by 62% in the Americas, 32% in Europe, 35% in Asia and 24 % in Africa.
- ❑ The biggest death tolls do not come from the actual fighting, however, but from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. These ‘indirect’ deaths can account for as much as 90% of the total war-related death toll. Currently there are insufficient data to make even rough estimations of global or regional ‘indirect’ death toll trends.
- ❑ Notwithstanding the horrors of Rwanda and Srebrenica, Bosnia, the number of genocides and other mass killings plummeted by 80% between the 1989 high point and 2001.
- ❑ International terrorism is the only form of political violence that appears to be getting worse. Some datasets have shown an overall decline in international terrorist incidents of all types since the early 1980s, but the most recent statistics suggest a dramatic increase in the number of high-casualty attacks since the September 11 attacks on the US in 2001. The annual death toll from international terrorist attacks is, however, only a tiny fraction of annual war death toll.

### ***Why We Have Fewer Wars***

The *Human Security Report* identifies three major political changes over the past 30 years that, Andrew Mack says, “have radically altered the global security landscape.”

*First, was the end of colonialism.* From the early 1950s to the early 1980s, colonial wars made up 60–100% of all international conflicts depending on the year. Today there are no such wars.

*Second, was the end of the Cold War,* which had driven approximately one-third of all conflicts in the post-World War II. This removed any residual threat of war between the major powers, and Washington and Moscow stopped fueling “proxy wars” in the developing world.

*Third, was the unprecedented upsurge of international activities designed to stop ongoing wars and prevent new ones starting that took place in the wake of the Cold War.* Spearheaded by the UN these activities included:

- ❑ A six-fold increase in UN preventive diplomacy missions (to stop wars starting).
- ❑ A four-fold increase in UN peacemaking missions (to end ongoing conflicts).
- ❑ A four-fold increase in UN peace operations (to reduce the risk of wars restarting).
- ❑ An eleven-fold increase in the number of states subject to UN

sanctions (which can help pressure warring parties into peace negotiations).

The UN did not act alone, of course. The World Bank, donor states, regional organizations and thousands of NGOs worked closely with UN agencies—and often played independent roles of their own. But the UN, the only international organization with a global security mandate, has been the leading player.

As this upsurge of international activism grew in scope and intensity through the 1990s, the number of crises, wars and genocides declined, despite the much-publicized failures.

The evidence that these initiatives worked is not just circumstantial. A recent RAND corporation study, for example, found that two thirds of the UN's peace building missions had succeeded. In addition, the sharp increase in peacemaking efforts led to a significant increase in the number of conflicts that ended in negotiated settlements. Approximately half of all the peace agreements negotiated between 1946 and 2003 have been signed since the end of the Cold War.

The annual cost of these changes to the international community has been modest—well under 1% of world military spending. In fact, the cost of running all of the UN's 17 peace operations around the world for an entire year is less than the United States spends in Iraq in a single month.

The *Report* argues that, in the long run, equitable economic development, increased state capacity and the spread of inclusive democracy play a vital role in reducing the risk of political violence. But it also argues that these factors cannot explain the dramatic post-Cold War reduction in armed conflicts.

### ***Why Today's Wars Kill Fewer People***

The explosion of international activism after the Cold War helps explain the subsequent decline in the *number* of armed conflicts, but it doesn't tell us why they became so much less *deadly*. Here the explanation is related to changes in the nature of warfare and (possibly) in the international refugee regime:

- ❑ The major wars of the Cold War era typically involved huge armies, heavy conventional weapons, and massive external intervention. They killed hundreds of thousands—sometimes millions.
- ❑ The overwhelming majority of today's wars are low-intensity conflicts fought with small arms and light weapons. They typically pit weak government forces against ill-trained rebels and rarely involve major engagements. Although often brutal, they kill relatively few people compared with the major wars of the Cold War era—typically hundreds rather than tens or hundreds of thousands.
- ❑ The decline in the battle-death toll is probably also related to the



huge increase in the number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the 1980s. By 1992, the peak year, the worldwide total of displaced people exceeded 40 million—up from little over 10 million at the end of the 1970s. Displacement is a humanitarian tragedy, but had these millions *not* fled their homes, hundreds of thousands—possibly far more—could have been killed. So the increase in displacement is likely one of the reasons for the decline in battle-deaths.

Finally, we know that countries ruled by authoritarian regimes have higher levels of violent internal repression and gross human rights abuses than do democratic regimes. At the end of the 1970s some 90 countries around the world were governed by authoritarian regimes; by 2003 there were just 30. The decline was steepest in the post-Cold War years when the numbers of genocides and other mass killings started to drop rapidly. In addition, the *Report*, finds that human rights abuses declined in 5 out of 6 regions in the developing world after the mid-1990s.

### ***No Grounds for Complacency***

Despite the positive changes it documents, the *Report* makes clear that there are no grounds for complacency.

Although wars and war-deaths are down, there are still some 60 armed conflicts raging around the globe. There are still gross abuses of human rights, widespread war crimes, and ever-deadlier acts of terrorism. And because the underlying causes of conflict are too rarely addressed, the risk of new wars breaking out, and old ones starting up again remains very real.

And, as the many failures of the past—and numerous recent reports—have made clear, the UN remains in urgent need of reform if it is truly to fulfill its mandate to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’.

That the world is getting more peaceful is no consolation to people suffering in Darfur, Iraq, Colombia, Congo or Nepal. To help them, policymakers need a better understanding of human insecurity. That is the central goal of the *Human Security Report*.

The *Human Security Report* provides the data and analysis that can help the international community evaluate the effects of conflict prevention and resolution policies. ‘Without trend data neither international agencies nor governments can tell whether or not their efforts are succeeding’, Mack said.

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***The Report can be downloaded from***  
***[www.humansecurityreport.info](http://www.humansecurityreport.info)*** *It will be published by Oxford University Press in November 2005.*

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taken to represent the views of these or any other government, or of the UN or any other agency.

**Professor Andrew Mack** is Director of the Human Security Centre, at the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia. He was Director of the Strategic Planning Unit in the Executive Office of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan 1998-2001. He has held research and teaching posts at Harvard, the London School of Economics, and the University of California, and in Australia, Denmark, Hawaii and Japan. His career has included periods as a pilot in the UK's Royal Air Force, as a meteorologist in Antarctica, as a diamond prospector in Sierra Leone and as a journalist with the BBC.

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### **Contact**

Andrew Mack +1 604 803 3548; andrewmack@attglobal.net

Zoe Nielsen +1 778 239 5787; zoe.nielsen@ubc.ca

