Securing Uganda’s Borders  
Eleanor Abrahams

Small arms and light weapons’ proliferation continues to be a major concern with devastating consequences for civilians - men, women and children. The spread of weapons across borders, often undetected, has further destabilised communities who live along these borders. Banditry, crime and cattle rustling have become common activities along the border between Uganda and Kenya.

A recent joint meeting of Kenyan and Ugandan officials identified illegal firearms as a major cause of cattle rustling and banditry along their common border. The result has been a heavy toll in human life and livelihoods. The two governments have agreed to work together to stop weapons trafficking and cattle rustling between the countries. This follows on-going efforts by the Ugandan government to combat the problem of small arms proliferation, which led to the establishment of a formal disarmament committee in 2001 and efforts to disarm ethnic groups in the Karamoja region of Uganda in 2002.

The disarmament initiative in Karamoja has been in two phases. The first was a period of voluntary disarmament of the Karamojong and provided an amnesty up to 15 February 2002. According to sources, only 7,676 guns out of an expected 40,000 were collected during the voluntary phase.

Following the amnesty, the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) in February 2002 proceeded to launch a forcible disarmament operation in the Karamoja region. This disarmament operation involved police methods in identifying and searching target areas. The enforced method of disarmament took place in parallel with a continued voluntary disarmament initiative. As disarmament of the Karamoja continues amidst growing insecurity, the government faces the challenge of convincing the ethnic groups in the north-eastern Karamoja sub-region to disarm.