Armed violence is a global problem affecting millions of people every year. Deaths and injuries, whether they are due to conflict, interpersonal violence, clashes between rival organised groups or religiously motivated attacks, are the human testimony to the scourge of armed violence.

The *Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development* estimates that in 2011, 526,000 people lost their lives due to armed violence, 390,000 of them were because of intentional homicides. Only 10% of these occurred in conflict. Clearly, violence is a problem that affects people in many areas beyond conflict zones. In addition to the human loss and suffering, negative consequences of armed violence affect entire communities and states, undermining social and economic development.

The *United Nations General Assembly Report* A/64/228 of 2009 considers insecurity, along with poverty, economic crises and climate change, to be a critical challenge to the goal of humanitarian protection, poverty reduction, and development. Damage to infrastructure and properties, limited delivery of public services, undermined investment in human, social and economic capital, and high expenditures on security services are just a few consequences of this problem.

Governments, civil society and international organisations are increasing their efforts to address the problem of armed violence through the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, the Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), and the UN General Assembly, amongst others.

Casualty recording can offer relevant, accurate and reliable data that in turn can inform how governments and civil society, among others, actually tackle the problems of armed violence. But in order for these actors to act truly effectively, it is also clear that more evidence is needed to show how casualty recording can contribute to reducing armed violence worldwide. This is the objective of this report.

Report by Mirko Miceli and Serena Olgiati

With contributions and research by
Gabriela Gutierrez, Jorge Restrepo, Julia Knittel and Serena Olgiati

Editor Iain Overton

With thanks to
Elizabeth Minor and Jacob Beswick (Oxford Research Group); Gabriela Gutierrez and Jorge Restrepo (Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos); Eileen Ipuan-Bautista, Ariel Hernandez and Charfilo Z. Manlupig (Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc.); Jasmin Nario Galace (Center for Peace Education, Miriam College); Srisompob Jitiromsri (Deep South Watch); Natacha Cornaz (Geneva Declaration Secretariat); Cate Buchanan (Surviving Gun Violence Project); Nerina Čevra, Jacob Parakilas and Robert Perkins (AOAV), and all who agreed to talk to us about their casualty recording practices. We hope that their views are properly reflected in this report.

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Cover illustration
Members of the Special Police Operations Battalion (BOPE) participate in a mission in the alleys of a slum in the area of Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on December 7, 2009.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images News/Thinkstock.

Infographic Sarah Leo

Clarifications or corrections from interested parties are welcome.

Research and publication funded by the Government of Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Design and printing Tutaev Design
Foreword

IAIN OVERTON
Director of Policy and Investigations, Action on Armed Violence

“There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees on single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurts it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm”.1

The philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote these words in 1940 as he saw Europe engulf in flames. Within the year he had taken his own life on the French-Spanish border, the threat of deportation to a Jewish concentration camp seemingly too great for him to bear.

They are words that resonate as much today as they did then. Syria is engulfed in flames, Iraq descends back into the abyss and gun violence takes thousands of lives a week. The single catastrophe the Angelus Novus sees in the 21st century has to be the terrible harm caused by armed violence, a harm estimated to take over half a million lives a year.2

Seeing this harm in its entirety is a gruelling task. Recording the true toll of armed violence reveals hard truths: it tells of underlying prejudices, of racism, of sexism: humanity’s ugliness. But only by turning behind us and calculating how many people have died and have been injured in a conflict, in a slum area, in a city in the grip of violence, can we ever begin to address the impact that armed violence has.

Counting the cost of armed violence holds a mirror up to any society and allows both its citizens and the wider international community to ask themselves: is this the world we want to live in? To this end, the fact that over 30,000 people die every year in the United States from gun violence has framed the debate on gun control there. The recording of over 3,000 people dead in Pakistan following drone attacks3 has triggered a United Nations investigation into the use of drones and a consequent call on states to launch inquiries into drone attacks that kill civilians.4 Witnessing the impact of armed violence has consequences.

This report lays out the importance of counting the true cost of armed violence. It focuses mainly on state practices but also looks at some efforts by civil society. AOAV has collaborated with the ever-vigilant Oxford Research Group who are working on a parallel report looking at how the United Nations helps count the mounting dead.

Action on Armed Violence is a proud member of the Every Casualty Campaign and we echo that campaign’s call here, because it is an ideal that should not be forgotten: we ask states to promptly record, correctly identify and publicly acknowledge casualties of armed violence, wherever and whenever this happens.

Of course, there is a distance between ideals and realities. The practice of casualty recording, despite quite clear demands under international law for it to be implemented in conflict situations, is far from universal. It is, and often has been, subject to political abuse. But more and more states, civil society and the international community as a whole appreciate the relevance of recording deaths and injuries from armed violence. African Union peacekeepers in Somalia, for instance, have recognised the importance of their own comprehensive data on civilian casualties and so have decided to set up their own civilian tracking mechanisms. Whilst casualty recording and casualty tracking differ in certain aspects, they both address the fundamental advantages of counting casualties of violence.

Perhaps it is even fair to say that casualty recording might be coming of age. The latest UN Secretary General Report on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict reflects this by recommending that “United Nations actors should work together to establish a common United Nations system to systematically record civilian casualties as part of broader efforts to monitor and report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, drawing on good practice and expertise from within the United Nations, Member States and civil society”.5

Of course, there are still growing pains. And to this end, AOAV has produced this report designed at helping states and organisations realise the ideal. We examine the benefits and challenges of casualty recording practices taking into account examples from different countries.

True, nobody can restore what has been lost through violence. But counting the cost of this violence at least gives us a glimpse of what Walter Benjamin calls ‘the pile of debris’, and that glimpse helps understand the true impact of violence. And it provides an incontestable argument for society to respond.

1 There is an angel in the painting.
2 Of course, there is a distance between ideals and realities. The practice of casualty recording, despite quite clear demands under international law for it to be implemented in conflict situations, is far from universal. It is, and often has been, subject to political abuse. But more and more states, civil society and the international community as a whole appreciate the relevance of recording deaths and injuries from armed violence. African Union peacekeepers in Somalia, for instance, have recognised the importance of their own comprehensive data on civilian casualties and so have decided to set up their own civilian tracking mechanisms. Whilst casualty recording and casualty tracking differ in certain aspects, they both address the fundamental advantages of counting casualties of violence.
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5 There is an angel in the painting.
**COUNTING THE COST**

**CASUALTY RECORDING PRACTICES AND REALITIES AROUND THE WORLD**

**CONFLICT & ARMED VIOLENCE**

- **AVERAGE ANNUAL HOMICIDES RATES PER 100,000 (2004-2005)**
  - < 3 HOMICIDES
  - 3-10 HOMICIDES
  - 10-20 HOMICIDES
  - 20-30 HOMICIDES
  - > 30 HOMICIDES

**GLOBAL AVERAGE 7.9 HOMICIDES PER 100,000 PEOPLE**

- **El Salvador**: 81.9 HOMICIDES PER 100,000 PEOPLE
- **Iraq**: 58.4 HOMICIDES PER 100,000 PEOPLE
- **Jamaica**: 58.1 HOMICIDES PER 100,000 PEOPLE

**MANY OF THESE EMERGENCIES ARE OF CHRONIC NATURE.**

- **40% OF COUNTRIES COMING OUT OF VIOLENCE RELAPSE WITHIN 10 YEARS**
- **90% OF COUNTRIES THAT HAD CIVIL WARS IN THE 21ST CENTURY WENT THROUGH CIVIL WARS IN THE PREVIOUS 30 YEARS**

**THE HUMAN TOLL OF ARMED VIOLENCE**

- **711,216** VIOLENT DEATHS BETWEEN 1985 AND MARCH 2014
- **24,763** VIOLENT DEATHS IN 2013
- **220,000** PEOPLE KILLED AND INJURED BETWEEN 2004 AND 2012

**THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ARMED VIOLENCE**

- **$65 BILLION** SPENDING ON HIDDEN COSTS DUE TO VIOLENCE BY 90 HIGHLY AFFECTED COUNTRIES
- **$37 BILLION** DUE TO MEDICAL EXPENSES AND LOST PRODUCTIVITY IN 2005

- **$284 BILLION** COST OF ARMED CONFLICT FOR 23 AFRICAN COUNTRIES BETWEEN 1990 AND 2005
- **$335BN** ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VIOLENCE IN 2013
- **$137BN** APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING TO HEALTH & EDUCATION

**FIREARM-CASUALTIES CAUSED A LOSS OF $15** TREATMENT OF A GUNSHOT OR ANTIPERSONNEL VICTIM

**ZAMBIA**

**MALAWI TREATMENT OF A GUNSHOT OR ANTIPERSONNEL VICTIM**

**THAILAND**

**USA**

**COLOMBIA**

**VENEZUELA**

**MEXICO**

**Date**: Full list of sources available on oecd.org.uk
Recording deaths and injuries caused by violence is a challenging and often contested practice. Practitioners around the world use various techniques to count casualties. This report focuses on the practice of recording casualties within their borders, but also at civil society level. It looks in particular at states’ practices to record casualties and how the two can work together.

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MAJOR FINDINGS

Recording

Practices to record casualties

In addition to casualty recording, there are other counting techniques that have been invaluable in illustrating the impact of violence. Among those, tracking casualties has been pivotal in informing military strategies and reducing the number of civilians killed in conflict. This technique has been successfully implemented by the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and will be implemented by the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Another technique for measuring casualties was developed by academics and focuses on mathematical estimations. This approach was used in estimating that in Iraq between March 2003 and June 2006, 601,027 people died due to violence.

Since 2010, the Explosive Violence Monitoring Project at Action on Armed Violence has been using a simpler technique to highlight particularly deadly forms of violence. This project monitors English-language media reports of explosive weapons incidents in which at least one casualty was identified. Whilst it does not aim to be comprehensive in the number of incidents recorded, it has been instrumental in generating evidence to help shape the international debate on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

All these techniques, with their strengths and weaknesses, ensure the debate on the human impact of violence remains high in international agendas and that victims of violence do not go unaccounted.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT

AOAV has focused on identifying key issues with the mechanisms for casualty recording and to provide examples of how the data has been used practically. It has looked at the main challenges of the data recorded, but has not carried out an extensive and thorough analysis of the quality of this data.

AOAV research in the Philippines and Thailand focused on particularly violent hotspots in the south of the countries—Mindanao and the Deep South—respectively. This has limited the number of experts interviewed by AOAV, especially in the case of Thailand.

CHALLENGES

Under-reporting

Under-reporting is the greatest challenge faced by recording mechanisms. This is due mostly to:

- Challenging environments for casualty recorders;
- A lack of willingness and capacity of casualty recording practitioners to share and compare datasets;
- Fear of retaliation against the victims; and
- Lack of trust in the public authorities.

Limited resources

Most of the systems have very limited resources to record casualties. Outdated computer programmes, few experienced staff and availability of only basic analytical tools often hamper the capacity of these institutions to produce utilitarian analyses. New technologies can go a long way to remedy these shortcomings. The report shows examples in Thailand and Jamaica where technology has advanced analytical capacities (see states’ practices, challenges, box 1).

Limited scope

Among the recording mechanisms there is a general tendency to adopt a narrow scope. In Colombia for example, almost 80% of recording systems focus on gathering data solely on victims of conflict. In contrast, it is estimated that as little as 13% of the casualties of violence are caused by the conflict. Similarly in the Philippines, over two thirds of the data collection systems focus on monitoring violations of human rights and neglect the high numbers of people victim of common crime, of clashes between clans and violence linked to the trade in illegal goods. This narrow approach often fails to produce a full understanding of the interconnection between different types of violence—which can reduce the impact of actions to address the problem.

Reliability of the Data

Reliable information is essential to any recording mechanism that uses evidence to inform practices. There are a number of indicators that help to assess reliability. For this report AOAV has looked at three elements:

- The presence of validation mechanisms to verify the data that is gathered;
- The accuracy of the data, with an emphasis on under-reporting and over-reporting; and
- The reliability of the data, with an emphasis on whether the data is accurate and complete.
The use of multiple sources to increase the comprehensive scope of the database; and

The transparency of the systems.

Validation mechanisms

Seventy-three percent of the mechanisms investigated here validate their data through a number of techniques – from corroboration of sources to on-the-ground investigations. Stronger mechanisms combine several validation techniques. This figure, however, fluctuates greatly. In Colombia, for instance, most systems validate their data whereas only half of them do so in the Philippines and Thailand.

Use of multiple sources of data

Collaboration between agencies is fundamental to ensure that there is comprehensive data collection and analysis. Each agency has access to a particular set of information that – when joined – helps to paint a fuller picture of the problem. AOAV found that just under 70% of the systems surveyed use multiple sources of information. Again, this percentage fluctuates between countries. The research highlights challenges related to the use of multiple sources, for example the risk of double-counting specific incidents, or the danger of over-reporting a specific type of armed violence due to the mandate of the agencies providing the information.

Transparency

Transparency when recording data on violence is particularly challenging. Protection of the victims and the informants providing the information, as well as the casualty recorders themselves, is essential. A recent event in Syria, where a casualty-recording practitioner was abducted because of her work, shows just how difficult it is to ensure recording mechanisms can continue to produce and analyse data after the conflict is over (see states’ practices, challenges, box 7).

Use of the data

A major challenge is to ensure that recording mechanisms produce data that can be analysed and used practically. This means that sufficient resources need to be available to casualty recording practitioners for them to interpret the information they are gathering and to develop concrete recommendations.

Even in cases where this data is being used, there are still issues that can prevent effective action. In the Philippines for example, AOAV has witnessed how senior officials in the army embraced a new approach to warfare aimed at reducing abuses against the civilian population. This new doctrine, whilst positive, is nevertheless slow in trickling down to the soldiers at the front and its impact is consequently reduced (see states’ practices, challenges, box 8). Often institutions are also slow in responding to armed violence cases brought to their attention. This time lag can lead to people taking matters into their own hands in the form of private retaliation and so not prevent the spiral into more violence.

Most institutions interviewed by AOAV use data to inform political debates and to evaluate policies. Around 40% of them use data to improve military strategies and to support victims’ rights. Whilst in Colombia, most of the systems (83%) use data to enable international cooperation, only a third of them do so in the Philippines and Thailand.

It appears from AOAV’s investigation the reliability of data directly determines its use. In Colombia, where most data providers validate the figures and use multiple sources of information, over 50% of the systems use data to enhance victims’ rights, inform academic research and evaluate policies. In Thailand and the Philippines, where fewer data collectors use multiple sources and validation mechanisms, information is most frequently used for advocacy purposes and to inform public debates.

The desktop research carried out by AOAV in this study highlights an additional number of benefits:

Prevent and Reduce Armed Violence

Casualty recording improves armed violence prevention and reduction. For example, this report shows how data is used to highlight specific homicide patterns. These then facilitate the design of adequate responses tailored specifically to the identified issues. An evaluation of such a policy in Cali, Colombia has shown a decrease in homicide rates of 14% throughout the periods when the policy was implemented (see states’ practices, benefits, box 9). Data to inform legal procedures requires a high degree of reliability and long investigations. Recording systems therefore should be clear from the start on the purpose of the data they are collecting in order to balance accuracy and verification with the urgency of making the information available.

Facilitate international cooperation

Casualty recording can enhance international cooperation in various ways. If high numbers of casualties are recorded and brought to the attention of the public, the United Nations (UN) Security Council might seek a resolution to prevent further abuses. Data on casualties can also be used as evidence to seek international financial and technical support to address specific challenges.
AOAV has approached this project in two ways: through desk research and through case studies comprising of targeted interviews with local actors.

**DESK RESEARCH**

Desk research included a review of academic publications, media reports, national legal frameworks and information gleaned from international organisations. Included in this report are examples from Brazil, Burundi, the former Yugoslavia, Guatemala, Iraq, Jamaica, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, the UK, the USA and Venezuela. Examples identified through desk research complement field investigations to illustrate particular aspects of this issue.

**INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL ACTORS**

AOAV carried out a series of interviews with people who are currently recording data on casualties. The focus was primarily on three countries: Colombia, the Philippines and Thailand. The choice was based on the existence of well-established casualty recording mechanisms and the existence of areas highly affected by armed violence. Geographical representation was also taken into account. AOAV carried out the interviews of practitioners in the Philippines and Thailand. The Colombian organisation Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos collected the data in Colombia.

In addition to the examples captured through desk research, AOAV has interviewed 33 academic, civil society and government institutions: 12 in Colombia, 12 in the Philippines, 6 in Thailand and one each from Mexico, Liberia and Indonesia.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTIONS**

In terms of the type of organisations interviewed directly by AOAV, the majority are governmental bodies (55%). Civil society organisations (CSOs) and academic research centres account for 36% and 9% of the total, respectively (see Fig. 1).

In Thailand, AOAV gathered information of casualty recording mechanisms in the southern provinces. Violence and data recording in the North was not considered. This choice was based on the existence of several recording mechanisms in the south of the country. The restricted geographical area considered by AOAV has limited the number of interviewees in Thailand compared to the Philippines and Colombia. Of the three main countries in which AOAV conducted field research, the Philippines is the only place where more civil society organisations (58%) were interviewed than governmental bodies (25%) (Fig. 2).

This study mainly polled data collection systems – those receiving information directly from people affected by violence and other primary sources – accounting for some 63% of all interviewees. The rest of the organisations use data for various purposes but do not record it directly.

**LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT**

AOAV has focused on identifying key issues and find examples of how data has been used practically. It has looked at the main challenges of the data recorded, but has not carried out an extensive and thorough analysis of the quality of this data.

In the Philippines it is also important to note that whilst AOAV spoke with people recording data on human rights violations in other parts of the country, most of the interviewees were focused on documenting human rights violations in Mindanao.

**CONTINUOUS**

Casualty recording involves documenting as much of the distinguishing information about incidents or individuals killed and/or injured as possible. This information includes:

- The date of the incident that caused deaths, and/or injuries, expressed as precisely as possible (e.g. with time if known);
- The location of the incident that caused deaths and/or injuries, expressed as precisely as possible;
- The number of people killed/injured in a given incident, if individual identities are not known. As much detail (e.g. combatant status, type of victimization) about casualties as possible should be recorded;
- A description of the means of harm involved (the type of weapons that were used);
- A record of the sources used to document the incident or individual casualty.

A record of the sources used to document the incident or individual casualty.

**TERMINOLOGY**

**ARMED VIOLENCE**

As defined by the OECD, armed violence is “the use or threatened use of weapons to inflict injury, death or psychosocial harm, which undermines development.”

For this research, the concept of armed violence includes armed conflict, defined by Uppsala University as “contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.” It also includes violence that happens outside of conflict situations, such as interpersonal violence.

**VICTIMS**

For AOAV victims killed and injured by armed violence include not only direct victims, but also families and communities impacted by armed violence, such as displaced communities. AOAV uses a definition of victims adapted from the 1985 UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. “Victims means persons who, individually or collectively, suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights” due to acts of armed violence.

**CASUALTY RECORDING**

Casualty recording strives to achieve the comprehensive, systematic and continuous documentation of individual deaths and/or injuries from armed violence, and/or the incidents in which these occur.

**COMPREHENSIVE**

Casualty recording aims to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of the deaths and/or injuries from the type of violence that is being documented, given the constraints of any particular situation. Some casualty records may only record casualties in one particular area of a country in conflict. Some may only record violence committed by one perpetrator or from one type of weapon. Others may only record civilian deaths, or concentrate on establishing and recording the fate of the missing or the identification of unknown victims. The goal for all, though, is the same: a record that is as thorough and complete as possible. Casu- alty recording will do more than provide a few illustrative cases for a specific situation.

**SYSTEMATIC**

Casualty recording aims to apply a methodology, which the casualty recorder has defined, in a consistent way to every case/incident. Casualty recording methodology may include putting in place: standard definitions and categories, procedures for corroborating and evaluating the information gathered, internal quality control procedures etc.
In the last few years, different types of recording systems have been established around the world. These include early warning systems, crime and violence observatories and public health injury surveillance systems, among others. Regardless of the type of monitoring system, close collaboration with the respective national government seems to be a common element that ensures their long-term effectiveness.19

This section looks at some of the challenges of recording systems that have been identified in this research. They are illustrated using specific examples that AOAV has identified from different experiences around the world.

Numerous obstacles undermine the implementation of comprehensive and accurate casualty recording systems. Depending on the settings and actors involved, difficulties may arise at different stages of the process, from the data collection process itself to the misuse (political and otherwise) of the final findings. Based on its research and the national cases analyzed here, AOAV has identified general and specific areas that threaten to limit the relevance and impact of casualty recording mechanisms.

**UNDER-REPORTING**

A major problem common to the many recording mechanisms reviewed by AOAV is the under-reporting of violent incidents. Even in countries with efficient casualty recording systems, many violent deaths and injuries go unreported. In Singapore, for example, estimating the number of homicides is still quite challenging since over 20 per cent of the deaths are classified as ‘undetermined intent’.23 In several high-income countries, the tools used to commit homicides “cannot be estimated because a high proportion of homicides are coded to ‘unspecified mechanism’: Portugal (27 per cent), Spain (22 per cent), and Israel (43 per cent)24.”

In areas affected by high rates of armed violence, AOAV noticed several factors that influence underreporting rates. Violent incidents often take place in hard-to-reach areas for data collectors, either due to the lack of infrastructure or because the situation in the area is life-threatening. People may also not report incidents because they live far away or they fear retaliation from the perpetrators. Under-reporting is also linked to a lack of trust in authorities and a failure by authorities to respond to the reported incidents. Sometimes it is simply a matter of a lack of capacity and willingness of data recorders to share and compare data.

These are significant challenges to overcome but when incidents are not properly reported, assessing the real impact of violence is made much harder. It can lead to a misinformed analysis and result in ill-informed responses to the problem.

**STATES’ PRACTICES**

**INTRODUCTION**

In the last few years, different types of recording systems have been established around the world. These include early warning systems, crime and violence observatories and public health injury surveillance systems, among others. Regardless of the type of monitoring system, close collaboration with the respective national government seems to be a common element that ensures their long-term effectiveness.19

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**Recording deaths and injuries**

Homicide data is generally considered the most reliable indicator of the impact of violence on people. This is due to very practical considerations: it is easier to define and count dead bodies than to identify and record injuries. However, recent approaches are highlighting the importance of recording injuries in order to accurately measure the extent of the problem.

“The millions of deaths that result from injuries represent only a small fraction of those injured. Tens of millions of people suffer injuries that lead to hospitalization, emergency department or general practitioner treatment, or treatment that does not involve formal medical care.”

Recording injuries is not only a matter of producing a full picture of the problem but also a question of economics. In Zambia, one malaria case treatment costs between 10 and 15 USD.21 “In contrast, a gunshot or antipersonnel mine-injured patient requires a minimum of 100 USD for a minor injury, to an average of 3,000 USD.”

The general narrative tends to equate a reduction in homicides with a decline in the overall rates of armed violence, neglecting the relevance of injuries in this equation. This can be a dangerous practice. Such an approach can be very costly, both in human and financial terms.
In certain parts of the Philippines recording reductions in the number of violations of peace agreements reflects a corresponding reduction in human rights abuses. However, deaths and injuries caused by clashes between rival clans or due to other common crimes are not always accounted for by existing monitoring systems. This is because these systems were designed to focus exclusively on the violations of peace agreements. A narrow focus can have dangerous consequences. On the one hand, it gives a misleading picture of the overall rates of violence in a given setting. On the other hand it hampers efforts to comprehensively address the causes of, and harm by, armed violence in the region.

Box 2

In addition to these general challenges, there are also a number of specific issues related to the scope of the systems, the ways in which data is collected and managed, the relationship between the actors that are involved in gathering information as well as to the use of the data.

LIMITED SCOPE

AOAV research shows that almost 60% of the systems in Colombia, the Philippines and Thailand record data on victims of conflict solely. In Colombia only two systems record the broader category of casualties of armed violence. This is the case even though recent data from this country suggests that only 13% of the victims since 1985 have been due to the conflict.28

When casualty-recording focuses only on one specific type of violence (such as violence in conflict zones), it can provide a misleading picture of the main victimisation factors. The 2011 Global Burden of Armed Violence report affirms: "In the majority of the countries experiencing or having emerged from armed conflict, the incidence of homicide is actually greater than the number of direct conflict deaths."29

So while the data collected may shed light on a certain, specific phenomenon, the picture it portrays is partial. A more complete understanding of the overall level of armed violence is needed in order to reveal how different types of armed violence are interconnected - something that could never be achieved through a narrow analytical focus.

RELIABILITY OF THE DATA

The absence of any ways to ensure that data is accurate raises significant questions as to the reliability of the figures. AOAV’s research shows that instruments producing reliable data are more inclined to use that evidence to inform legal procedures, support victims’ rights, evaluate policies and programmes and inform academic research. When reliable casualty recording mechanisms are established as part of a peace negotiation, armed actors on both sides tend to be more considered in respecting the terms of any peace agreement. They know that possible violations will be reported and they will have a negative impact on their position at the negotiation table.

On the other hand, mechanisms with less reliable and transparent information use figures on deaths and injuries for purposes that require a lower level of accuracy, for example to inform political debates and for general advocacy messages.

In order to assess the reliability of the data AOAV has considered three elements: the existence of validation mechanisms, the use of multiple sources of data and the transparency of these mechanisms.

VALIDATION MECHANISMS

Recording systems should have strong protocols in place to verify the data that is being gathered. This challenge is especially hard for systems that rely on secondary data culled from primary sources, for example in the monitoring of media reports. AOAV research has found that in Colombia, most of the recording mechanisms validate their information, while only half of them do so in the Philippines and Thailand. The most common validation mechanisms identified by AOAV include independent on-the-ground investigation of the cases, the corroborations of sources and the comparison of datasets. Systems often use a combination of these validation techniques to strengthen accuracy.

In Colombia certain organisations rely on secondary data, such as the Observatory of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario, DDHHID) and the National Network for Information (Red Nacional de Información) but do not have verification processes in place. Other organisations, however, recognise that strong validation procedures are necessary. Mostly these are systems that aim to support reparation for victims.

The first stage of their verification procedures consists in identifying the alleged victim, including personal details that are certified through other existing official sources. Then they seek to certify that the
USE OF MULTIPLE SOURCES OF DATA

Collaboration between different organisations and agencies is fundamental to ensure there is comprehensive data collection and analysis. For example, the morgue will have details about the deaths and the police might have information about the perpetrators. Hospitals will have information on the injuries, whilst a local civil society organisation might have records of violence in the area where the killing occurred through its engagement with local communities. Similarly, different ministries or international agencies will have different information on a specific theme, depending on their area of expertise.

Among the recording mechanisms captured by this research, just under 70% use multiple sources of information. The numbers differ considerably between countries. In Colombia, all the mechanisms do, whilst none of the mechanisms recorded in Mindanao use multiple sources of information. If the final analysis of the event lacks all or part of the overall information, the end data set would be incomplete. In turn, this would limit the identification of specific problems. However, care must be taken. Multiple source recording systems can enhance reliability of the data. But they also increase the risk of double-counting the same incident. And, even in cases where validation mechanisms are in place, different databases are often not uniform in the presentation of the data, which makes corroboration very challenging. Sometimes multiple source systems might also exaggerate the impact of a certain type of violence, or the number of incidents in a specific geographical region. This occurs when multiple recorders focus on the same area or type of violence.

Lack of a clear system to share data and transparent methodologies on how data is recorded increases the danger of duplication of the cases recorded. It can also hamper collaboration between recording systems and hence cause a duplication of efforts. “One of the major challenges posed within clusters is that each partner may have its own set of definitions and methodologies, making the harmonisation of information difficult, if not impossible”.

The Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) is an independent institution established in 2011 by Action on Armed Violence in collaboration with several local partners to provide an accurate picture of armed violence in Liberia. LAVO gathers relevant information from the police, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, non-governmental organisations and national media. LAVO is also seeking to collaborate more with the Ministry of Gender, as this Ministry keeps a database on gender-based violence. Having access to this database is important for improving the understanding on a relevant aspect of the violence in Liberia, an understanding so far limited due to the lack of specific data.

An additional problem encountered by LAVO in Liberia is the absence of a centralised patient database for information provided by Liberia’s health institutes. Since each hospital keeps its own separate records it is more challenging for them to be able to share the information with other partners.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is one of the key challenges when dealing with sensitive data concerning armed violence. Whilst it goes without saying that the protection of both the victims and the people recording and collating the information is essential, institutions still ought to be transparent about the numbers they publish. They should produce disaggregated information and share information on the methods that are used to collect and code the data. Transparency reinforces the position of casualty recorders when challenged about the figures. “When our data was politically attacked, people who came [journalistically and academically] to our defense were able to cite our transparent methodology and sourcing”.

Many organisations do not disclose their data at all, or only do so to a select group of other internal governmental agencies. Very few organisations disclose information on the methodology they use to collect the data. Even when data is disclosed, it can be presented in summaries that do not help the analysis. Only one third of the systems recorded by AOAV publish the datasets with a level of disaggregation that allows for independent analysis.

Lack of transparency and limited disaggregation hamper the reliability of the information and reduce the chances for analysis and practical application of the data. The Oxford Research Group’s report on UN casualty recording systems states “UNHCR [UN High Commission for Refugees] valued UNAMA [UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] human rights reports not only because of the information produced, but also because they were clear in their biases and shortcomings. Methodological transparency gave UNHCR2 additional confidence in how they might use report findings”.

A good example of how institutional transparency can be increased comes from Mexico, where it is estimated that between 1997 and the first half of 2013, 7,000 people died violently each semester. There have been many complaints from institutions and the public about lack of transparency in the numbers of people affected by violence published by official databases. This situation led to the creation of several civil society initiatives, for example the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad. This citizens’ movement, established in 2011 by the journalist and poet Xavier Sicilia after his son was killed, aims to challenge the military response to organised crime in favour of peaceful solutions that avoid civilian casualties.

The lack of information also triggered the adoption of the 2008 National Agreement for Security, Justice and Lawfulness committed to create citizen observatories across Mexico to address public security issues. This led in 2009 to the creation by different civil society organisations, universities and research centres of the Security, Justice, and Legality National Citizen Observatory (Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano de la Seguridad, la Justicia y La Legalidad, ONC). The Observatory releases updated casualty information through its website. For instance it gives official figures on homicides, kidnappings, extortions and violent thefts. Furthermore, in February 2013, the recently elected Mexican government responded to a call for increased transparency by announcing a revision of the official database on persons missing or disappeared. Recognising substantial challenges with the actual database, the government has stated it is committed to building a unified national register that should address previous inconsistencies and unify existing state registries into a unique federal one.

In addition, the Mexican Institute for Statistics, INEGI, has made available online the micro data of the National Survey on Victims and Perception of Public Security (Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública). This includes listing specific types of violence, weapons used and event-based information regarding violent incidents experienced by the victims. Whilst data on homicides was available also before the surge in violence, the war against organised criminal gangs has influenced the level of disaggregation, the type of information recorded and the public availability of the information.

Detailed and raw information is rarely shared by casualty recording practitioners but it is incredibly helpful to support independent analysis.
In Nigeria, military records on civilian casualties are strictly confidential, used for internal security assessment, and almost always inaccessible for media and the general public. Sometimes the Chief of Army Staff issues general figures but more detailed information is rarely obtainable.

The Baga case shows how controversial casualty figures can be in cases where obscure methodologies are used. In April 2013, violent clashes between rebels of the Boko Haram group and governmental security forces in the village of Baga, in the northeast part of the country, killed many civilians and left a large number of houses burnt and destroyed. However, the exact number of people that died is still debated. The International Red Cross and Human Rights Watch estimate a death toll of more than 180 bodies, whilst a local senator claims that more than 200 persons have been killed. Based on official sources, the army considered these figures as grossly exaggerated and argued that only 37 people, including six civilians, have been killed in Baga. The debate around this incident has not been settled yet and it is causing additional tensions between local communities and the army.

**Box 6**

**LEGACY OF THE SYSTEMS**

International organisations or states supporting casualty recording systems should ensure, where possible, that there is established local ownership of recording systems and should provide sufficient training and financial resources to avoid the project failing. A study from 2010 by the Geneva Declaration affirms that 55% of the funds used by monitoring systems come from national states and 28% of them are funded by international organisations.

Armed violence, clearly, does not abide by timetables: it does not begin when a conflict begins and ends when a conflict ends. Recording mechanisms should continue to monitor violence after a conflict is officially declared over. A better understanding of post-conflict violence can also prevent countries from falling back into open conflict. The question of legacy is something that international organisations and donor countries need to take into account at the time of planning for the establishment of new recording mechanisms. As reflected by Oxford Research Group in their report on UN casualty recording practices “(...)This highlights the need for UN programmes whose relevance may continue beyond the lifetime of UN involvement to develop a workable plan for their legacy**.

In Burundi data from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shows that in 2012, 0.3 million people were still displaced by the violence. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helped establish a National Observatory on Armed Violence. The Observatory has monitored the incidences of armed violence across country since 2008. In addition, UNDP supported a joint study on the impact of armed violence in Burundi with League Iteka, a local organisation. This was carried out by the Small Arms Survey in 2009. However, national authorities and UNDP encountered challenges in transferring the observatory to the government under the Ministry of Public Security. Without the financial and technical support and multiple data sources available to the UN system, the National Observatory has had limited capacities to effectively implement its mandate to monitor and record armed violence.

Consequently, the current system has few data sources. It relies on police reports and some information gathered through the media. But cases are often under-reported and there are limited resources to verify the data. This situation does not allow for a full analysis of the impact of violence in Burundi based on data recorded by the Observatory. The current National Observatory would be in a much stronger position if the handover to national ownership had been more comprehensive and provided for the necessary training and resources to continue developing the surveillance system.

**Box 7**

**USE OF THE DATA**

**HIERARCHICAL GAP**

In cases where data is used to change the attitude of actors engaged in preventing and reducing violence, for example among security forces, a shift in opinions at senior level does not mean automatically that the attitudes of officers in the field will also change. To be successful, changes in approaches need to be integrated into bottom-up military and police doctrines and become an integral part of the training curriculum for all security officers.

In the Philippines, the Internal Peace and Security Plan of 2011 highlights the commitment of the army to respect human rights, international humanitarian rules and good governance. This commitment to tackle the problem of violence seems to have been embraced in the higher ranks of the army. As one official told AOAV “We want from wanting to win war, to wanting to win peace.” Many civil society organisations interviewed stated that the Philippine military today is friendlier towards civilians and more open to non-governmental organisations than before. There is also evidence that suggests a decrease in impunity among soldiers who commit violations. Training on human rights for the lower ranks is, however, not compulsory. This means that doubts remain on the extent to which the new doctrine has been embraced by lower ranks engaging in field operations.

**Box 8**

**INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS**

The fact that data is recorded does not automatically mean that there is the capacity, skills or even motivation to analyse and use the compiled information. Recording systems often do not have the means to analyse the data in a way that produces concrete recommendations for policy makers. Those managing data are also often unable to promptly respond to problems identified, such as in the rapid addressing of victims’ needs. Long assessment procedures, the lack of coordination and, to a certain extent, mistrust between responsible institutions all can undermine their effectiveness. As a consequence, people might resort to alternative means of justice such as private retaliation – which, in turn, can result in more violence.

On the contrary though, if institutions react fast and coherently to the challenges highlighted by the evidence, they can implement successful programmes and tackle armed violence effectively. In the USA, as an example, homicides in 2008 were the second leading cause of death among persons aged 15 to 24. In the same year, over 26,000 young people aged 15–24 were treated in emergency departments for non-fatal injuries sustained from firearms assaults. To respond to this problem, a number of initiatives were implemented throughout the country. For example, the “Safe Street programme” introduced in certain neighbourhoods of Baltimore between 2008 and 2010 has led to a decrease in homicides varying between 34% and 53% depending on the neighbourhood where it was implemented.

In Venezuela at least 24,763 people were killed violently in 2013 (79 for every 100,000). A qualitative study from 2011 looked at the impact of gun violence in low-income neighbourhoods of the capital city Caracas. It found that even when the victims or their relatives lodged an official complaint, the competent authorities often assumed the shooting was associated with personal grudges, and on many occasions failed to handle the case properly. Official investigations were delayed, the crimes were unpunished and the families who sought justice were often targeted for further retaliation by the perpetrator(s). Due to this institutional inability to address the original crime, survivors experienced secondary victimisation, including frustration, sadness and fear. The study pointed out that young man, angry about the seeming impunity given to those who committed the crime, were prone to retaliate, fuelling the cycle of violence in the outskirts of Caracas.

**Box 9**
BENEFITS

Casualty recording has several benefits. Solid and accurate data on the numbers of people killed or injured within armed violence contexts might fulfill different goals. Collecting personal information about deaths and injuries brings about a certain degree of dignity to the victims, and helps families know what happened to their loved ones. Both personal and event-based information supports further analysis of the causes and consequences of violence. It can help identify patterns of violence and shed light on the possible drivers of violent clashes. In turn, the ability to point to a specific trend enables policy makers to tailor initiatives that tackle armed violence. Or it can help law enforcement agencies to improve their tactics for combating widespread-armed violence.

In the following pages, the benefits of recording deaths and injuries are illustrated through practical examples based on experiences in different violent contexts around the world.

PREVENT AND REDUCE VIOLENCE

Information on casualties, both deaths and injuries, can be used to highlight specific patterns and trends of violence. According to Professor Michael Spagat, conflicts “present some sort of regularities” and therefore collecting detailed information might lead to a better understanding of the conflict itself. Once a probable pattern and causes are identified, changing or improving current practices might lead to an effective reduction of the lethal consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Casually recording has several benefits. Solid and accurate data on the numbers of people killed or injured within armed violence contexts might fulfill different goals. Collecting personal information about deaths and injuries brings about a certain degree of dignity to the victims, and helps families know what happened to their loved ones. Both personal and event-based information supports further analysis of the causes and consequences of violence. It can help identify patterns of violence and shed light on the possible drivers of violent clashes. In turn, the ability to point to a specific trend enables policy makers to tailor initiatives that tackle armed violence. Or it can help law enforcement agencies to improve their tactics for combating widespread-armed violence.

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STATES’ PRACTICES
Like other cities in Brazil, Belo Horizonte saw at the turn of the century a steep rise in homicide rates. Between 1997 and 2011 homicide numbers grew by one hundred percent. 3,256 deaths occurred between 1998 and 2002.

In light of this rise in violence, casualty recording data in Brazil has been fundamental towards the identification of the most violent urban areas, for understanding the characteristics of victims and perpetrators, and to inform implementation of specific programmes to reduce the violence.

The Stay Alive project was developed in 2002 by the Study Centre on Crime and Public Safety (CRISP) and the Federal University at Minas Gerais (UFMG). It was implemented in partnership with the City Council. The violence reduction strategies it employs includes crime mapping and focusing on young males under the age of 24. It also provided social support programming, as well as violence prevention training to those communities and groups most affected by armed violence. In so doing it has been identified as being part of the reduced levels of violence in Belo Horizonte, with a reported 47% decrease in homicides and 85% decrease in attempted homicides thirty months after the start of the programme. In the same period, in other areas of the city less prone to violence there was an 11% increase in violent deaths.

**EVALUATE THE-economic impact**

The negative effects of armed violence on an economy can be devastating and can lead to deep and lasting economic deprivation in both societies involved and in neighbouring countries. A recent study by the Institute for Economics and Peace calculated that the global costs of violence containment, which is understood to be any direct and indirect action aimed at preventing violence or addressing its consequences, are over 2.4 times the size of the total gross domestic product (GDP) of Africa.

There are two main categories of costs that are often used to evaluate the economic impact of violence on society: direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs include destroyed infrastructure, factories, machinery, farmland and military expenditure to an economy. The Mexico Peacem Index project puts the direct cost of violence in that country in 2013 at approximately 45.9 billion USD.

The second is more controversial, in part because it is difficult to evaluate and includes things like economic losses to tourist industries, the emigration of skilled workforce or the often hidden costs of health care for victims. The same study has assessed the total economic cost of violence in Mexico for 2013 at over 334 billion USD, more than 27% of Mexico’s GDP and almost double the level of government funding provided to health and education.

Analyses of these costs can often be undertaken through the employment of sophisticated accounting techniques, by calculating the total value of goods destroyed or using techniques such as considering the fiscal gap between a hypothetical conflict-free country and the actual situation of the country in question.

A variety of studies provide different perspectives on this issue. For instance, Oxfam estimates the cost of armed conflicts for 23 African countries between 1990 and 2005 at more than 284 billion USD.

These costs should not be ignored. Indeed, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development claims that non-conflict armed violence produces direct and indirect economic effects that can far exceed the costs of more explicit armed conflict.

In the United States in 2005 it was estimated that firearm-related casualties caused a loss of 37 billion USD due to medical expenses and lost productivity. If other factors are added to this cost, like loss of quality of life, psychological and emotional trauma, decline in property values, legal expenditure and social consequences, in 1998 the annual costs of gun violence in the U.S. were estimated at around 100 billion USD. Another study has examined the direct and indirect costs of violent crime in different cities in the USA. It puts the average annual costs of violent crime at more than 1,300 USD per person.

**Inform political debates**

In politics there is a need for evidence-based data. Governments need data to prove the outcomes of policies and in so doing, seek to reinforce public support for their actions. Of course, the other side of the coin is that political opponents may also use data to show the downsides of political decisions, and in so doing garner votes for proposing alternative ways to address various social issues.

Data however, can be political in and of itself. Today, new digital communication networks enable conflict- ing data sources to emerge and challenge the status quo. The digital age, with leaked documentation and data that is less controlled by a central force, has created a new relationship between political elites and public opinion.

Responding to this in part, politicians are increasingly opening up their governments to transparency and scrutiny. Specific agencies or independent organisations are being tasked to collect pertinent data to demonstrate the political will to be open and their ability to produce tangible results.

In all of this, casualty recording still remains highly political. But a growing societal understanding of the importance of reliable data and increasing access to new technologies, for both governments and the general public, are changing things for the better. Today, the ways by which official numbers on casualties of violence are reached are being challenged and questioned.
The numbers of deaths and injuries by armed violence remains a major political topic on all political levels. As such, when casualty figures emerge that highlight how violence is harming a specific community, and especially when such figures hit the international press, politicians are often more inclined to take very concrete steps to reduce the levels of armed violence.

On a daily basis, the police, the military, the Emergency Call Center and local media all pass on data relating to any violent episodes to Deep South Watch. This information is checked and processed so as to create a database that contains details about the victims (name, gender, religious beliefs), the incident (time and place) and any weapons used. Summaries of the incidents are then made available on the Deep South Watch website.

According to Srisompob Jitpiromsri, director of Deep South Watch and the Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity, the data produced by them is used in parliamentary debates, helping impartially shape and evaluate security and peace policies that have been implemented in the southernmost regions.

Evaluate policies
Reliable casualty data can play a crucial role in shaping policies. The number of persons killed or injured can be used to evaluate the implementation of specific policies designed to reduce levels of violence. To this end, a range of actors uses casualty recording methods: governments, international organisations, the media and civil society organisations as well as research centres and universities.

Data on casualties can also draw attention to specific patterns of violence that require new policies to address them. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the threat of suicide bombers or the illegal smuggling of weapons are but a few examples. Therefore, casualty recording, in addition to providing evidence-based evaluation of existing policies, also highlights the impact of new or recurrent threats that have not yet been addressed. Although it seems self-evident that policies benefit from accurate casualty recording data, more research is needed to establish this connection.

In the year 2004, there were 1,253 violent insurgency-related incidents recorded in southern Thailand. These resulted in at least 573 people being killed and left another 524 people injured — figures that include civilians, police, soldiers, and other government officials. In 2005, realising the severity of the situation and fearing the spread of violence to other parts of the country, the Thai government imposed an Emergency Decree: State of Emergency (BE 2548/2005) in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. This special order needs to be ratified every three months by the Prime Minister, along with the approval of the Council of Ministers.

The Emergency Decree greatly extends powers to search and arrest, and enables power of censorship to those relevant authorities working in the identified areas. It also grants civil, criminal and disciplinary immunity to these authorities when performing their duties ‘in good faith’ and driven by ‘the necessity of the circumstances’.

The Emergency Decree has been repeatedly extended in most areas for the last fifteen years — leading to organisations such as Human Rights Watch and the Asian Human Rights Commission to express concern at this controversial practice.

Deep South Watch was hired by the central government to analyse the impact of the emergency decree on the Southern Provinces. Their data from the areas most affected by violence, alongside population surveys, caused them to conclude that the Muslim majority opposed the decree, whilst the Buddhist minority, as well as the army, believed that lifting the decree would endanger them. These results led Deep South Watch to advise the government to lift the decree in those districts impacted by lower levels of violence.

The government is slowly responding to these recommendations and at the time of publication has lifted the emergency decree in two districts. There is still much more to be done, but this seems a tentative step in the right direction.

SUPPORT VICTIMS’ RIGHTS
Of all the consequences of armed violence, its impact on victims and their families is without doubt the most concerning. Data on death and injuries is vital to achieving a better understanding of the impact that armed violence has on communities. The Victim Unit in charge of supporting victims of conflict in Colombia has registered 6,073,453 victims killed and injured up to 21 January 2014. More than five million of them have been displaced by the conflict; 636,184 were victims of homicide, and just over 10,500 are landmine survivors.

In certain places, such data is now intrinsic to the structure of the state’s operations. The establishment of law enforcement and judicial authorities in many Western countries during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century has as a result highly sophisticated the systems to collect homicide data. To date, data on homicides is widely available and international comparisons across more than 200 countries are now possible. Despite this, for many countries homicide data is still based on incomplete datasets and — in many cases — estimates.

The Surviving Gun Violence Project has produced a list of existing international standards relevant to survivors of gun violence. It mentions, for example, the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985) which enumerates the rights of victims to access justice, restitution and compensation. This Declaration provides a relevant definition of victims as well as a number of good practices to support their rights.

Expanding on this effort, AOAV has compiled existing international standards on armed violence victims’ rights, including an overview of the main obligations concerning casualties recording. It shows that the Geneva Conventions of 194911 have had a deep and lasting impact. Counting casualties in situations of armed conflict has increasingly become more systematic, although initially the focus of the Conventions was mainly on soldiers that were killed and injured. Respect for the deceased, the need for humanitarian relief operations and general support for those families that have been impacted by armed conflict are just a few of the principles of International Humanitarian Law that were enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols.
Today, other international political instruments have been established, such as the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2006) and the Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence (2010). Both of these recognise that there is a need for countries to strength-

en their understanding of the impact of armed violence on civilians. The 2015 review of the Geneva Declara-
tion is an opportunity to reinforce states’ commitment
towards the people affected by armed violence and
to improve the inclusion of victims in relevant policy arenas and programmes on their rights.

Casualty recording helps fulfill these international com-
mittments and conventions. Casualty recording is the first step in the recognition of human rights. Without
data on the people who have been killed and injured, states cannot ensure access to services needed by
the victims. Being recognised as a person, and having your victimisation recognised is in itself a human right.

Recording any data on deaths and injuries is very sen-
sitive and as such casualty records should be partic-
ularly careful in protecting the victims, making sure
that they give their informed consent to provide the
requested information and ensuring that the process of
gathering the data does not provoke unnecessary trauma in the victims.

In 2011, the enactment of Law 1448 in Colombia,
known more popularly as the Victims’ Law, repre-
sented a milestone in attempts to redress in part
the suffering of victims and internally displaced persons that was caused by the country’s armed conflict.

Law 1448/11 considers a victim to be any person
who suffered serious violations of their human
rights under international humanitarian law as a
consequence of the internal armed conflict since
January 1st, 1985. It also extends the same recog-
nition and rights to victim’s spouses, permanent
partners, and first-degree family members.

The Law also provides for reparations. These in-
clude financial compensation and the offering of
social services (education, healthcare and psycho-
logical support) to those victims of human rights vi-
olations and of international humanitarian law
infractions. It also recognises the rights of victims
to ‘justice’, ‘truth’ and the guarantee of a non-re-
currence of the suffering caused by the parties to
the internal conflict. It contains an extensive sec-
ction on land restitution that contemplates the re-
turn of the land to the victim who lost it as a
consequence of the armed conflict. If returning
the land is not possible, the State has the obligation
to offer a financial compensation to the victims.

To be recognised as a victim under the above def-
inition, individuals have to submit a formal applica-
tion to the ‘Special Administrative Unit for the
Comprehensive Attention and Reparation to the
Victim’. This unit will cross-check the information
submitted against the National Information Net-
work for the Care and Reparation of Victims – a na-
tional and regional database on violations
committed under the Victims’ Law. If the claimed-
for violations and damages are confirmed, victim
status is granted and the individual accordingly in-
cluded in the Register of Victims.

To cite other examples, the registration of victims
of terrorism and of any significant displacement is
also mandatory by law in Colombia. The register
should – at the very least – record the identity of the
victim and the location and description of the event.
A new law enacted – 1839 - also requires any
health agency that treats victims of acid attacks to
hold similar comprehensive records.

Box 9

INFOGRAPHIC PROCEDURES

Accuracy and reliability of information are essential el-
ements if data is to inform legal procedures. Detailed
and solid information is of utmost importance. It can
make the difference between accountability and im-
munity.13 Court decisions directly impact the future of
the victims and the perpetrators, but they also have
broader implications. For instance, by punishing the
perpetrator the court reaffirms the validity of the set
of legal rules promulgated by the state and reinforces
the trust in the institutions.14 If these considerations
are true for petty crimes, the role of casualty recording
is even bigger in major legal cases tackled by interna-
tional criminal courts that often deal with numerous
victims and several perpetrators.

A key element that needs to be considered here is that
recording information to support legal procedures is
very time-consuming and requires in-depth investiga-
tions that can last a very long time. This is not ideal if
data is at the same required urgently to inform humani-
tarian action in affected areas, for example. It is there-
fore of the utmost importance that casualty recording
practitioners cautiously balance accuracy and strong
reliability with the urgency of publicising the informa-
tion. The purpose of recording mechanisms needs to
be clearly established from the beginning. In cases
where those systems have more than one purpose,
the procedures to gather and verify the data need to
be clearly thought through.

In Guatemala, the Commission for Historical Clar-
ification estimates that over 200,000 people were
killed or forcibly disappeared in the civil war be-
tween 1960 and 1996. Of the victims identified by
the Commission, 83% were indigenous Maya. State
forces and paramilitaries were responsible for 93%
of the violations documented by the Commission.

In May 2013, the former Guatemalan military ruler
Efrain Rios Montt was convicted for genocide and
crimes against humanity. He was found guilty of
the massacre of the Ixil, an indigenous group, in
1982 and 1983. During the trial, testimonies of
forensic experts of the Guatemalan Forensic An-
thropology Foundation contributed vital evidence
about casualties. Collating evidence from exhumations
and interviews, they were able to identify re-
mains of Ixil victims, and details about the traumas
suffered.

Their statements enabled witness testimonies to be
backed with scientific fact. Despite this, on 20 May
the verdict was overturned by Guatemala’s consti-
tutional court due to issues with the proceedings.
The forensic evidence, however, remains valid and
is now being used by lawyers of the victims to seek
a ruling by the Inter-American Commission on
Human Rights that would enforce the overturned
conviction.

Box 9

Nine-year-old August Larsen makes a crayon rubbing of his father’s name where it appears on the bronze plaques that
surround the edges of the 9/11 Memorial pool during the tenth anniversary ceremonies of the September 11, 2001 terrorist
attacks at the World Trade Center site, in New York City. Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images News/Thinkstock.
The prosecution of Slobodan Milosevic at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia provides an example of how casualty recording may influence the court.

As President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Milosevic exercised control over numerous institutions essential to support the crimes for which he was indicted: one count of war crimes (muran) and three counts of crimes against humanity (murder, deportation and persecution). For the parts of the trial concerning Kosovo, Milosevic’s defense was based on the assumption that the Kosovars had fled the country because of the NATO military operations and not due to the actions of the Serbian military units under his control.

The Office of the Chief Prosecution commissioned a research to investigate the patterns of deaths and migration in relation to NATO air strikes and the activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The research team, composed by experts in data management, statistics, data matching and international relations found that the patterns of both refugee flow and expulsions exhibited characteristics consistent with the existence of an external cause but not caused by the NATO air strikes or the Kosovo Liberation Army’s activities. Instead, the analysis based on casualty recording data found that the Yugoslav forces were responsible for systematic campaign of killings and expulsions causing numerous deaths among the civilian population. This evidence was used to dismantle the arguments used by Milosevic’s defense team.

ENHANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

Casualty recording often provides important strategic information to both military and law enforcement authorities. Around 40% of the systems recorded by AOAV use data for this purpose. Data about rebels and their activities provide an example of how casualty recording can facilitate law enforcement strategies.

The African Union Mission in Somalia’s (AMISOM) mandate has a strong military focus. This military approach to peacekeeping in response to Al-Shabaab attacks in the region has had a high civilian impact, particularly as AMISOM’s has frequently been carrying out operations in Somalia’s cities. Human rights groups have accused AMISOM of being indiscriminate in their shelling of populated areas and claimed that scores of civilians have been killed in incidents. Between 2010 and mid-2011 an estimated 1,000 civilians have died and 4,000 were injured in such shelling. The World Health Organisation reported over 6,000 individuals admitted to hospital in Mogadishu for injuries incurred by armed violence in the first six months of 2011. Many of these were victims of artillery fire.

Such figures led the Chairperson of the African Union Mission to express concerns about the high number of civilian casualties and that this could harm AMISOM’s credibility and erode public trust in the organisation. In response to such recorded casualty figures, AMISOM adopted new rules of engagement. In 2011, a new ‘indirect fire’ policy tightened the rules governing the use of artillery and made measures of provision for assistance to civilian victims.

It also began the process for the establishment of a civilian tracking-cell with the mandate to identify trends, respond to incidents and facilitate assistance to victims. Accurate casualty figures are still difficult to obtain because the civilian tracking-cell was not functional at time of press. Nevertheless, the Centre for Civilians in Conflict, a civil society organisation supporting AMISOM in building up the cell, says there has been an evident decrease in civilian casualties since the application of the new policy. The new tracking mechanism will be able to corroborate this claim.

The USA military in the recent Iraq conflict has been confronted with unacceptably-high rates of civilian casualties at check points.

In September 2008 an elderly civilian driver with cataracts was unable to see the warning signals given by the military to slow down. The soldiers fired warning shots but the driver, unable to stop his truck owing to poor brakes, was fired upon and killed. In another case, a USA marine opened fire at the front grille of a car that was failing to slow down approaching a checkpoint. This stopped the car; but also killed seven people inside, including two children. These are but two incidents that came to light when whistleblower organisation Wikileaks released the Iraq War Logs, the confidential military logs showing 13,963 checkpoint incidents across Iraq from 2004-2009.

In 2006, the USA Army issued the Traffic Control Operations Handbook presenting new rules to handle escalation of force situations. Dr. Wakeman, from the USA Army Training Doctrine Command, said the handbook aimed at improving training and increase awareness of Iraqi culture “to teach soldiers something other than a kinetic response”. The death rate of civilian casualties dropped after this introduction of alternative non-lethal solutions for soldiers to stop vehicles approaching checkpoints, though it is hard to definitely prove cause and effect. A similar situation has also been identified in Afghanistan, where the data of the Civilian Casualty Tracking Cell set up by the International Security Assistance Force played a fundamental role in changing the directives concerning escalation of force at check points. By the Tracking Cell’s own account, this directive was successful in reducing civilian casualties. Escalations of force, it found, “produced 50% less deaths in the eight months following the new directive, compared to the same amount of time in 2009.”

FACILITATE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Casualty recording and the data it produces can facilitate and influence international cooperation and interaction on many levels. For instance, the data collected on the numbers of deaths and injuries and the circumstances of the violence in which these events occurred can, at a certain point, draw attention from the international community and, in particular, from the UN Security Council. Under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council is mandated to investigate any threat to peace, breach of the peace or any act of aggression. As such, if evidence of any violation is found and peaceful measures are not effective, the Security Council may resort to military actions (Art.41-42).

Recent events in Syria have highlighted, despite ample proof of significant harm to civilians, how difficult getting consensus on international action can be. It is nevertheless undeniable that casualty data triggers international attention and can strengthen collaboration between donor countries and affected communities. In 2012 alone, approximately 38% of all overseas direct assistance— or 50 billion USD—was devoted to fragile and conflict-affected states. High rates of armed violence have also influenced the approach of the USA to Latin America. Between 2009 and the beginning of 2014, the USA will have provided 6.1 billion USD for military and police aid to countries in the region. This is more than half the total amount allocated for the same period by the USA for economic and social purposes in Latin America.

AOAV believes that casualty recording is fundamental to promoting international cooperation in various forms. It should be acknowledged, however, that casualty...
The National Violence Monitoring System in Indonesia is an innovative effort to provide data and analysis regarding conflict and violence across several regions. The project is led by the Coordinating Ministry for People’s Welfare, with support from the World Bank and The Habibie Center. The World Bank mainly provides financial support and collaborates with the monitoring system in efforts to share global good practices and expertise.

The National Violence Monitoring System has collected data on violence, primarily using media sources, since 1997. It currently covers 13 Indonesian provinces. After collating information from relevant and reliable sources, the data is processed and inputted into templates with specific categories, such as location, date, actors, and the type of violence. Processes of standardisation and systematic quality controls at every stage help ensure the reliability of the information publicised on the website.

The public availability of information is one of the main strengths of this system. The data provided by the system brings violence issues into the public debate, overcoming the traditional limited flow of information between people and government.

**Box 13**

**Iraq Body Count (IBC)** is a UK-based non-governmental organisation founded with the specific goal of continuously tracking and analysing Iraqi civilian deaths since the USA military intervention in 2003. The database contains information on documented civilian violent deaths and figures are publicly available on the website and constantly updated. The sources are primarily press and media reports integrated with data provided by official and government agencies.

The Iraq Body Count team collects data broken down into 18 variables (data, time, place, target, min/max deaths, min/max injuries, weapons, killers, media sources, primary witnesses) and person (name, age, gender, marital status, parental status, occupation).

Their data at time of going to press revealed that there were between 121,506 and 134,802 documented civilian deaths from violence since the beginning of the Iraq mission. The victim-centric data produced by this project has informed analyses and commentaries on the war in Iraq, but has also promoted a wider discussion on the monitoring of casualties in conflict situations. A number of studies, for instance, have used this database to investigate patterns of violence or trend in conflicts. A 2011 study for example established that suicide bombers in Iraq killed significantly more Iraqi civilians than coalition soldiers and that civilian children were more vulnerable than civilian adults.

It is undeniable that Iraq Body Count’s data helped provide evidence in the international debate on the war in Iraq. Their findings were used by international and regional organisations like the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which helps European states formulate and discuss policies on asylum requests, and many others that disseminate information on casualty recording practices, AOAV carried out in-depth analysis in three countries: Colombia, Thailand and the Philippines.

**COLOMBIA**

**COUNTRY PROFILE**

This case study is based on research carried out by the Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos (CERAC). An extended report on the case of Colombia is available separately.

For over 40 years, Colombia has experienced an internal armed conflict that has been responsible for widespread civilian suffering. Different actors have been responsible for atrocities committed across the country: the leftist FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército del Liberación Nacional), drug traffickers, government troops, right-wing paramilitary groups and various criminal gangs. Each group competes for political, economic, and military control over resource-rich areas of the country, where the state’s grasp on power is often weak.

The National Centre for Historical Memory published a report that helps understand the conflict in Colombia. It summarises that:

- A total of 218,094 people have been killed between 1985 and 2012
- A total of 1,754 people were victims of sexual violence between 1985 and 2012
- 1,754 people were victims of sexual violence between 1985 and 2012
- 177,307 (81%) of them were civilians and 40,787 (19%) were combatants
- A total of 25,007 forced disappearances happened between 1985 and 2012
- 5,712,506 persons have been displaced between 1985 and 2012
- 27,023 kidnappings happened between 1970 and 2010. 90% of them were carried out by guerrilla groups.

Whilst ongoing peace negotiations between the government and the FARC, along with demobilisation efforts, are all promising steps forward, Human Rights Watch (HRW) sees the situation as still critically volatile.

Human rights defenders, community leaders, trade unionists, journalists, indigenous leaders and displaced persons all regularly receive death threats. Armed groups resort to violence, or threaten it, to displace Colombians from their homes, and use the land in various ways: to undertake illegal mining; for drug production and trafficking; to give plots of land to farmers that support them; or to sell the land to multinational agribusinesses for commercial crop production.

The epicentres of violence have also moved to urban areas where drug trafficking, youth delinquency and a culture of violence and impunity are rife. In addition, an increased supply of arms among the civilian population means all these drivers pose extra challenges to stability and security.
MAIN FINDINGS
Differing statistics exist on the number of victims of the conflict in Colombia. Whilst the National Centre for Historical Memory reports over 200,000 people killed in the conflict between 1958 and 2012, the Victims’ Unit in charge of recording victims of the conflict has registered over 600,000 homicide victims from 1985 to January 2014 (see page 24). This discrepancy is partly due to different recording timelines, but differing definitions and methodological approaches as well as varying levels of capacity and resources could also be part of the explanation. This case illustrates the many challenges that still exist at the time of recording casualties of violence in areas affected by conflict and armed violence.

In its research, CERAC identified several roles for casualty recording practices in Colombia, as well as certain limitations of the systems in place.

Casualty recording supports academic research
In December 2012, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar), with the Observatory on Children Welfare (Observatorio del Bienestar de la Niñez), published a report investigating youth involvement in armed groups. Using victim data that looked at the youngsters involved, the findings helped underline how cultural attitudes towards arms among youths play a key role in explaining their vulnerability to joining armed groups. The report asserts that masculinity in Colombia is linked economically for their families. This makes them more susceptible to involvement with armed groups.70

Casualty recording is used to prevent violence
Data provided by the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses) has been used by the government to roll out preventive policies. Based on this data, in 2012 numerous cities in Colombia applied restrictions to the right to carry weapons. Following from these restrictions, there have been in both 2012 and 2013 reductions across the board, compared to 2011, in the numbers of homicides registered by the Crim Observatory of the National Police (Observatorio del Delito de la Policía Nacional de Colombia).71

Casualty recording influences new laws
Information and data on deaths and injuries has led to the enactment of a new Colombian law that specifically deals with crimes using acid as a weapon. Law 1639, passed in 2013, raises the prison sentence for perpetrators, compels medical centres that treat victims of acid attacks to keep a register of victims, and clearly defines the support that must be given to victims in terms of psychological and physical rehabilitation and regulates the use and distribution of certain acid substances.72

A narrow scope can limit an understanding of the causes of violence
The main challenge in Colombia is one of relying too heavily on the data that is collected. According to the data elaborated by CERAC, 75% of the Colombian organisations collecting information on deaths and injuries do so only for casualties of the conflict. However, armed conflict, as opposed to all armed violence, accounts for only 13% of the overall national victims of violence. Organised crime, drug trafficking, interpersonal violence and other types of criminality account for 87% of the total number of affected people.

This focus on conflict has been mainly dictated by the heavy human toll due to fifty years of internal fights. Nowadays, other forms of armed violence are increasingly prominent. Unfortunately, the understanding of the main drivers of violence is often still limited and too narrowly focused.

A focus on victims should not lose sight of issues relating to armed violence
Most Colombian monitoring systems focus mainly on victims but few focus on the perpetrators. This means, often, that information that is collected fails to take into account important data on the drivers behind a violent event, such as the circumstances by which it occurred, the weapons used or any institutional response to the underlying problems.

Under-reporting is a common challenge
CERAC’s research underlines that under-reporting is the most common problem for organisations and institutions collecting information on deaths and injuries due to armed violence in Colombia. Despite rigorous methodologies and accurate verification procedures, when victims do not report an event to the relevant authorities, or where data sources are deemed unreliable, important information and data on armed violence are often not captured.

Funding and staff are often limited
Many institutions stress the need for more funding to support organisations in charge of collecting information on the people affected by violence. Funds are said to be needed in particular to invest in technology and to hire experts to improve quality and analytical capacity.

Arauca, Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), Front of eastern war, September 2012. From the book ‘Walking Colombia. From the heart to the head’. (© Oscar Paciencia, DFARC https://flic.kr/p/jdpJJ8)
THAILAND

In 2003, Thailand’s Deep South provinces saw a significant rise in violence, with conflicts peaking in 2004. The authorities and rebel groups in the southernmost provinces are linked to historical issues and social-cultural differences. In this area of roughly 13,500 square kilometres, 80% of the population is Muslim and speaks Malay as a first language, as opposed to the Buddhist majority and Thai-speaking population in the rest of Thailand, and discriminatory policies against the local Muslim community over the years, are seen as the main causes of the unrest in the southernmost provinces.

The levels of violence in the southernmost provinces have, however, gradually declined since 2006 with the implementation of several programmes to reduce the economic disparity and improve communication and dialogue with local communities. In 2012, a promising three-year policy issued by the National Security Council acknowledged the political dimension of the violence and codified both political decentralisation and greater dialogue as official strategies.

In February 2013, the Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra signed a peace deal with the Barisan Revolusi Nasional rebel group. However, leadership failures within the group and the simultaneous presence of numerous other rebel groups in the region has cast doubts on how successful this initiative will be in ending the violence in the Deep South.

The latest reports on violence in the region, along with reported high rates of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of violence, are of concern.

The truth remains that, between January 2004 and September 2012, at least 5,377 people have died and another 9,513 were injured due to the conflict in the Deep South alone.

MAIN FINDINGS

Casualty recording is feasible even with limited resources

Deep South Watch, a research centre, began casualty recording in 2004 with very few resources available. Through the use of Excel and Access software, they record a vast number of violent incidents and produce simple summaries that starkly illustrate the impact of the conflict. Whilst this does not allow for in-depth analysis, it is enough to show the extent of the problem and produce basic trends – even on a limited budget. As demonstrated by the research of Oxford Research Group on UN casualty recording practices, basic trends and general counts are “viewed as useful in principle, to drawing attention to the realities in a conflict environment.”

Cooperation among different actors can happen even while the conflict is ongoing

The army, police and civil society organisations such as Deep South Watch have established an effective way to monitor casualties of violence. Deep South Watch receives daily reports from the army, the police and other local data providers, such as media and hospitals, and gathers all this information into one central, publicly accessible database. These actors recognise that possessing reliable data on casualties is, ultimately, in their own interest and can be used to efficiently tackle the problem on the ground.

Security concerns do not impede transparency

Whilst not all disaggregated information is public, the police and the army share daily reports with civil society organisations. This includes information on the location of the event, the number of victims, the type of violence and other relevant information that is then published on the Deep South Watch website and made public through regular bulletins. Such openness has not posed a security risk. AOAV has found that generally there is a good balance between security concerns and the need for transparency, with some caveats presented below.
Even if data is publicly available, it might not raise international attention

Even though data on the impact of the conflict in southern Thailand is publicly available and, compared to other similar situations, quite comprehensive, there is still relatively limited international media interest in the violence in the south. One reason given for this lack of international attention is self-imposed censorship by some international journalists living in Thailand. Since they need to renew their permits to work in the country every few months, they are likely to report on regular violent clashes, unless they are particularly horrific. It is also believed to be linked to a general attitude of international editors to view Thailand as a tourist destination rather than a country that is facing important security challenges. Finally, it was suggested that international media attention tends to focus on conflicts that cause higher number of casualties per incidents and where western countries have a direct stake in it. Nevertheless, further research would be needed to identify reasons why publicly available data on casualties in this particular case does not raise the same level of international outcry that other conflicts appear to do.

Obscure definitions hamper transparency and reliability of the data

One major challenge AOAV identified in the way casualties are classified by the police and the army, and subsequently by Deep South Watch, is the obscure criteria used by police headquarters to determine whether an incident is caused by insurgency groups or whether it is due to common crime. Since the criteria used by the police are classified, there is a risk that a number of violent incidents actually linked to the insurgency are reported as common crime, and vice versa. Local journalists that report on every major incident are key in limiting errors and bias that could be caused by this practice.

Transparency does not extend to the methodologies used and the raw data

Since the data that is available is made public only through summaries and bulletins, experts find it difficult to produce in-depth analysis of the conflict and look at the methodological approaches that are used to record the data. It would be useful for Deep South Watch to provide further information on the methodologies that are used and to be able to share aggregated data before having analysed it.

A major street in Bangkok is seen with tires burning during violent protests in central Bangkok, Thailand, on May 16, 2010. Paula Bronstein/Getty Images News/Thinkstock.
groups. Following a 2009 massacre in Maguindanao, an Independent Commission against Private Armies was created in recognition of the proliferation of groups of armed civilians and the threat they were posing to civilians. Casually recording mechanisms should not overlook this phenomenon.

Underlying issues such as land resources and the high availability of firearms (estimated at roughly 610,000) are also key elements that should be considered in efforts to reduce violence.

**MAIN FINDINGS**

**Data recording mechanisms indirectly help to maintain peace**

When reliable and credible casualty recording mechanisms, recognised by both main parties, have been established in the Philippines, armed actors on both sides have tended to be more considered in respecting the terms of any peace agreements because they know that possible violations will be reported and could have a negative impact on their position at the negotiation table.

**Local communities can be key in supporting casualty recording practices**

Organisations interviewed by AOAV, such as the Mindanao Human Rights Action Centre (MinHRAC), that monitors most of the violations of the peace agreement in Mindanao, provide training in human rights to local communities so that they can support them in recording violations in remote areas that most humanitarian agencies cannot access. In certain regions of Mindanao this has resulted in an increase in the number of violations recorded through local community leaders that had not been captured previously by international organisations and media. MinHRAC is exporting its experience to neighbouring countries in order to improve the impact of their respective casualty monitoring systems.

**Technology helps**

Text messages are commonly used to communicate possible violations of the peace agreement to the main organisations recording data, even in remote areas. Good mobile phone coverage in the Philippines and the fact that many people have a cell phone makes this system effective and fast. This is particularly important since casualty recording is often used to inform humanitarian action, and a rapid humanitarian response can depend on the promptness by which an incident is reported and verified. Platforms such as Ushahidi provide direct support to casualty recorders in setting up incident reporting systems using mobile phones and other technologies.

**A narrow scope gives a limited understanding of the causes of violence**

The main limitation identified among casualty recording mechanisms in the Philippines is that they mostly focus on monitoring violations of the peace agreements. This means they record violations committed by one or the other party in the conflict exclusively. Very few of them record other forms of violence such as clashes between clans or drug-related violence. Those that do include such forms of armed violence, often fail to make their information publicly available. Unfortunately, this single-minded focus can give a biased view of the causes of violence in the country, which in turn might inform responses to violence that fail to properly address other driving factors.

**Documentation for building legal cases is very difficult to verify**

Whilst the verification of data recorded in violent situations can be a challenge, this task becomes even harder if data is used to inform legal cases against perpetrators. The aim of casualty recording systems needs to be clearly established from the beginning, since different verification mechanisms are required depending on the intended use of the data. For instance, it might be useful to separate, or clearly mark, data that aims to inform legal action and needs to be further investigated from data used to inform immediate humanitarian action. This ensures that relevant information used by humanitarian agencies can be verified and published as soon as possible instead of needing long and thorough investigations before being made public. Doing so should not prevent any initial evidence that is used for humanitarian purposes, to be used to inform legal cases at a later stage.

Institutional responsiveness can be slow even if the data is available

Even when victims properly file cases of violations in the Philippines, relevant institutions are often very slow in responding to these. This is particularly challenging because it breaks down the trust in the institutions, increases impunity and can lead people to seek justice through other means. In a country with such easy access to weapons, along with very high numbers of militia and civilian armed groups, this alternative justice is often the cause of renewed violence.
CONCLUSION

Counting civilian casualties matters. The number of people killed and injured by armed violence provides vital evidence in helping assess the impact of violence on society. As Peter Drucker, a management consultant who contributed to the foundations of modern corporations,102 once said: “What gets measured, gets managed.” As the examples documented in this report demonstrate, recording civilian casualties plays an important role in reducing the lethal consequences of armed violence.

This report reassesses that casualty recording happens in very challenging environments. It shows that casualty recording is increasingly being recognised as useful by state authorities. And it shows that, whilst recording efforts still face major challenges, practices to record casualties are improving.

Several techniques to estimate casualties exist, from mathematical estimations to media monitoring, from casualty tracking to casualty recording. All these techniques are often at the centre of heated debates; with their strengths and weaknesses they are beneficial in keeping the international community alert to the devastating impact of violence on the people affected. Most systems record both deaths and injuries, although certain approaches consider injuries to be too difficult to measure and tend to focus their attention exclusively on deaths.

Casualty recording represents the first and fundamental step to publicly acknowledge the suffering of those killed and injured. It helps societies meet the rights of victims by informing legal cases and facilitating social, psychological and economic reintegration. Moreover, casualty recording indicates areas where humanitarian aid, relief operations or interventions to help affected communities are most needed and helps evaluating policies and programmes. Therefore accounting for the injured and not only the dead is key.

It is undeniable that casualty recording practices face several challenges often linked to a lack of human and financial resources and limited capacities to analyse and use the data that is recorded. This does not prevent practitioners around the world from continuing their work. And their number is growing. Alone, the International Practitioners Network established in 2009 by the Oxford Research Group counts 48 organisations who contributed to the foundations of modern corporations.

In conclusion, casualty recording presents vital opportunities for reducing armed violence and for effectively addressing its consequences. Practices around the world nevertheless need to be strengthened in order for this data to properly inform action. To this end, AOAV is working with a group of committed civil society organisations to call upon states to improve their practices to record casualties to ensure that victims are promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHEN POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Having recognised the benefits of casualty recording, the international community should come together to discuss avenues to promote and strengthen these practices. In addition to improving recording of deaths, particular attention should be paid to strengthening injury surveillance systems.

States should commit to recording deaths and injuries from armed violence systematically and comprehensively. They should ensure that these systems are set up as early as possible in order to be able to facilitate the verification of the cases, provide an opportunity for trend analysis and inform well-timed action. Systems should also have the capacity to record information on the injured after their hospitalisation in order to provide evidence on the long-term impact of armed violence.

Donor countries, international and civil society organisations should commit financial and personnel resources to support affected countries in setting up locally-owned and sustainable casualty recording systems. A 2011 study from the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development shows that most of the systems captured in their research were funded by national states (55%), followed by multilateral funding (28%). A key challenge that AOAV has identified is the pervasive lack of trained personnel in casualty recording and the impact that this has on sustaining recording initiatives in the longer term. Training more personnel will also go a long way towards addressing the issue of under-reporting.

Academics and researchers can support a call for stronger casualty recording practices by stressing how counting the cost helps society understand the deep causal relationships between violence and other variables. Research such as the analysis of the trends and patterns of conflicts, as undertaken by Professor Michael Spagat, is very useful in advancing the understanding of conflict dynamics.
RECORD INJURIES AS WELL AS DEATHS
Recording injuries as well as deaths is essential for any recording system that aims to use the information to enhance responses to the problem and programmes. Too much weight is still put on deaths alone as a proxy for the overall impact of violence. This study suggests that a reduction in homicide rates does not automatically correspond to a decrease in the overall rates of violence. Knowing the extent of non-fatal consequences of armed violence influences adequate responses in the long-term.

DEFINE A COMPREHENSIVE SCOPE
Often casualty recording is set up to respond to political necessities and international obligations. It might collect information only on cases that constitute a violation of human rights, or only record victimisation due to a certain type of weapon. Some systems focus exclusively on deaths and injuries due to conflict. Casually recording structures set up to support victims sometimes fail to consider the processes that have led to the violent event, such as the circumstances in which it occurred, the type of weapon used and the institutional response to the problem. In order to efficiently protect civilians, it is important to understand how different types of violence are interconnected. In this light, it is recommended that actors in casualty recording gather information about any form of violence that is happening in areas of concern.

PROFIT FROM TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES
New data products and technological devices can greatly improve casualty recording. They allow for the fast recording of incidents, safe data storage, and easier sharing of information with different actors. In addition, using more sophisticated software allows for elaborated statistical analysis that can better underline trends and features of the armed violence. Although it should be acknowledged that the latest in technological tools cannot be used in all situations, it remains nevertheless often a very accessible and relatively cheap way to enhance analysis of the data. Jamaica’s experience in using spatial instruments to record crimes is but one example of how technology can support casualty recording. Platforms such as Ushahidi provide direct support to casualty recorders in setting up recording systems supported by the latest technology.

ENHANCE RELIABILITY OF THE DATA
This research has highlighted important shortcomings when it comes to the strength of the collected data. A number of responses can address this challenge. AOAV has focused on three of them: strong validation mechanisms, the use of multiple sources of data and transparency.

Combined validation mechanisms – from cross-referencing of data sources to on-the-ground investigations of each case – are directly correlated to the use of data for purposes that require very solid evidence, for example support to the victims of violence, academic analysis and evaluation of policies and programmes.

Multiple sources of information are fundamental to getting the most detailed and systematic classification of deaths and injuries possible. Depending on the role and activities of each agency, it will have information that others might not be able to get. Sharing of experiences among national and external actors can also prove instrumental in overcoming limits within the systems by adapting or referring to experiences in similar contexts elsewhere.

DETERMINE HOW TO USE THE DATA
Recording data is only one step towards defining effective responses to the problem of armed violence. Since the information concerning armed violence can be very sensitive and open to political and other abuse, it is imperative that any use of the data is not based only on individual result-oriented initiatives but that it also aims to address broader structural and social changes that can sustainably reduce violence. From the start, the recording mechanisms should carefully balance accuracy and reliability of the data with the urgency of providing evidence to inform action. They should also include personnel that have the technical capacity to analyse the data that is recorded. These are essential pre-requisites to effective use of the data.
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