

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **African nations should support an Arms Trade Treaty**

**Statement by the Control Arms Campaign: Oxfam International, Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) .**

African nations were today challenged to publicly declare their support for an international Arms Trade Treaty as the France-Africa Summit began in Mali.

Only last weekend, leaders from 52 Commonwealth countries, 18 of them African, called for better control of small arms and for negotiations to begin on an Arms Trade Treaty. African countries including Mali, Ghana, Senegal and Kenya have already given their backing to the Treaty, which would ban all arms transfers which are likely to lead to human rights abuses. Other African nations should follow their lead, said campaigners.

"In West Africa alone we have two countries emerging from conflict, another where conflict is simmering and a fourth teetering on the brink," said Mohamed Coulibaly, regional conflict reduction advisor for Oxfam. "The trafficking of arms in the region increases the risk of an explosion of violence, which is why it is so crucial that African leaders speak out with a single, authoritative voice, against the arms trade that has had such a devastating effect on their people."

States on the Peace and Security Council of the African Union were identified by campaigners as countries that can take the lead on pledging support for an Arms Trade Treaty.

"The theme of the France-Africa Summit is African youth. The uncontrolled trade in small arms shatters the lives of millions of young people across Africa," said Christiane Agboton-Johnson, Director of Mouvement contre les Armes Légères en Afrique de l'Ouest, Senegal, and a leading member of the IANSA network. "In wars such as those in Sierra Leone and Liberia, most of the fighters were children. Yet arms control is not even on the agenda of this summit. It is time African leaders made the strict control of arms a priority."

There are an estimated 30 million small arms in sub-Saharan Africa. In West Africa alone, it is estimated that over 2 million people have been killed by small arms since 1990.

Five years ago, ministers from across Africa came together in Mali to produce the Bamako Declaration, a

common African position on the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. This set out their vision for tackling the problem of arms and had a positive impact on the first UN conference on small arms, held in 2001, but it was not strong enough.

In June 2006, the second major UN conference on small arms will take place in New York and this is an opportunity to get global agreement on the need for an Arms Trade Treaty. But such controls will not become a reality without vibrant and passionate African support.

"The Bamako Declaration showed that African leaders can speak with one voice, but to make a real impact, they should explicitly call for a global ban on arms transfers that are likely to be used for serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law," said Mark Neuman, Amnesty International's Control Arms campaign manager. "In the run up to the UN world conference on small arms in June 2006, African leaders must stand together to call for stricter controls on the arms trade."

#### **Notes to editors**

States on the Peace and Security Council of the African Union are Algeria, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan and Togo.

#### **Background**

The Control Arms campaign was launched by Amnesty International, Oxfam International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) in October 2003. It aims to reduce arms proliferation and misuse and to convince governments to introduce an internationally binding arms trade treaty.

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