

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Arms traffickers enjoy impunity as all UN arms embargoes in the last decade “systematically violated”**

### **Report from the Control Arms Campaign: Amnesty International, Oxfam International and International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)**

UN arms embargoes are systematically violated and must be urgently strengthened if they are to stop weapons fuelling human rights abuses, according to a report <sup>1</sup> being presented to the UN Security Council today (Thursday).

According to the Control Arms Campaign, every one of the 13 UN arms embargoes imposed in the last decade has been repeatedly violated. And despite hundreds of embargo breakers being named in UN reports, only a handful have been successfully prosecuted.

*“Over the past ten years systematic violations of United Nations arms embargoes have met with almost no successful prosecutions. Unscrupulous arms dealers continue to get away with grave human rights abuses and make a mockery of the UN Security Council’s efforts,”* said Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

Control Arms campaigners will today appeal to the UN Security Council for states to strengthen the enforcement of UN embargoes. They will argue for a raft of new measures, including the urgent agreement of an International Arms Trade Treaty.

This Treaty would enable governments to act in unison to strictly control conventional arms transfers, thereby creating the conditions for UN arms embargoes to be properly respected. Since the Campaign began in October 2003, over 45 countries have stated their support for such a treaty.

According to the report:

- UN investigative teams tasked with monitoring the embargoes are given woefully inadequate resources and time;
- Despite UN mandatory arms embargoes being legally binding under international law, many states have not even made violating an embargo a criminal offence;
- Arms export, import and freight documents are routinely faked and state officials often cover up arms

transfers;

UN peacekeepers are sometimes not trained to adequately record markings on weapons, while UN missions do not have adequate means to monitor ports of entry in embargoed zones.

*“Illegal arms dealers are getting away with murder on a daily basis. Embargoes must be strengthened but even then they will remain a blunt instrument. They are often imposed by the UN Security Council on the basis of politics rather than principles and are usually deployed too late to save lives. The world urgently needs an Arms Trade Treaty if we’re to stop weapons getting into the wrong hands,”* said Barbara Stocking, Oxfam’s Director.

According to campaigners, between 1990 and 2001 only 8 of 57 conflicts had UN arms embargoes imposed. Even when UN embargoes were agreed, it was generally only once a conflict had begun. An Arms Trade Treaty would provide a broader framework to prevent weapons being sold before wars start or human rights abuses reach their peak. This would also enable tougher enforcement of UN embargoes according to common standards based on international law.

Today, Control Arms campaigners from around the world will also be marking 100 days to go until the UN world conference on small arms in June. During the next 100 days, campaigners in 110 countries will be holding marches, concerts and stunts to put pressure on their leaders to support an Arms Trade Treaty.

*“In the 100 days until the UN world conference on small arms starts, an estimated 100,000 people will be killed with arms and many more will be injured and suffer severely in other ways from armed violence. Today, people from Kenya to Canada to Chile will be calling on their leaders to demand global controls to stop weapons falling into the wrong hands,”* said Rebecca Peters, Director of the International Action Network on Small Arms.

Over 800,000 people in 160 countries have already given their photographs to the Million Faces Petition, which is the world’s largest photo petition, calling on leaders to back stricter controls on the arms trade. It will be delivered at the June conference, representing the million people who have been killed by arms since the last UN conference on small arms in 2001.

#### **Footnotes**

1. *“Strengthening compliance with UN arms embargoes – key challenges for monitoring and verification”* by Brian Wood, Amnesty International, published by the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs in its Occasional Paper series, March 2006

#### **Further information**

For more information or to request an advanced copy of the report and background in, please contact:

Amnesty: James Dyson on + 44 (0) 207 413 5831 Mob: +44 (0) 7795628367

Oxfam: Clare Rudebeck on +44 1865 47 2530 or Mob: +44 7769 887 139.

IANSAs: Anthea Lawson: +44 (0)20 7065 0875 Mob: +44 (0)7900 242 869

For a copy of a background media briefing on UN embargoes please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engior400072006>

For a copy of the report presented to the UN Security Council, *“Strengthening compliance with UN arms embargoes – key challenges for monitoring and verification”*: please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engior400052006>

#### **Editor’s notes:**

The Control Arms Campaign is a joint initiative by Amnesty International, Oxfam International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSAs). It aims to reduce arms proliferation and misuse and to convince governments to introduce a binding arms trade treaty.

Public Document

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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