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Lethal arms vanishing "without a trace"

New report from the Control Arms campaign: Amnesty International, Oxfam, IANSA

There is more likelihood of being able to trace a suitcase or a GM tomato than lethal weapons, according to new research released today by the Control Arms campaign. The lack of a global system to track small arms and ammunition means exporting countries cannot be held accountable for their weapons reaching human rights abusers and war criminals.

The report by the Control Arms campaign - Amnesty International, Oxfam International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) - shows that while weapons and ammunition often do carry basic serial numbers, there is no worldwide system to record this information in sales of small arms. This renders them useless as a tool to identify, locate and trace illegal arms shipments.

Those countries selling arms illegally can simply claim ignorance of how the weapons ever ended up in the hands of killers.

The Control Arms report *Tracing Lethal Tools* is released as the United Nations Marking and Tracing conference begins today in New York. The report urges the UN to immediately adopt a legally binding international tracing and marking system for small arms, light weapons and ammunition.

It is outrageous that you have more chance of tracking a GM tomato or a suitcase than you do an AK47 or rocket launcher. A piece of lost luggage can be tracked from San Francisco to Sierra Leone within hours, yet deadly weapons disappear without trace on a daily basis, said Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

Government's resistance to a global system for tracking arms transfers has meant that it is nearly impossible to prosecute people or hold governments accountable for illegally selling arms and breaking UN arms embargoes.

The illicit arms trade fuels human rights abuse on a massive scale. Every year thousands of people are killed, tortured, raped and attacked with guns that cannot be traced. Millions more are deprived of the right to a decent standard of living, health services and education because funds are diverted to buy illegal weapons. It is time the world had a way to clearly identify those behind this cynical and deadly trade and

bring them to justice, said Amnesty International's General Secretary Irene Khan.

A tracing system would help combat the abuse of weapons by allowing them to be tracked from the time they were produced to the end user. It would help to identify arms brokers who violate national or international law, help enforce arms embargoes and ultimately it would help save lives.

In the recent massacre in Gatumba in Burundi in which 150 people were killed, spent cartridges showed that the ammunition used in the attack was manufactured in China, Bulgaria and Serbia. However the lack of any tracing mechanism meant it was impossible to prove how it got there. Had a tracing mechanism existed, those who sold the ammunition to the killers could have been held accountable and future supplies could have been stopped.

International tracing systems already exist for several goods, including food made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which can be tracked from production to supermarket shelves to ensure quality control. Suitcases can also be easily tracked via international computer systems throughout the world's airports.

Eight million new weapons are manufactured every year and countless crimes and atrocities are committed against civilians around the world. Yet there is precious little chance of prosecuting the perpetrators of violent crimes with no global system to prove the origin of weapons, said IANSA Director Rebecca Peters.

The Control Arms campaign sees a global system for marking and tracing weapons as one vital step towards improving the regulation of the arms trade. A comprehensive system requires the adoption of an International Arms Trade Treaty and a convention to control the activities of arms brokers. Hundreds of thousands of people from across the world and several governments have already backed the campaign.

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For a copy of the report please go to: www.controlarms.org

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The report, *Tracking Lethal Tools* calls for governments to work with the UN's current negotiations on an international tracing and marking instrument as part of the United Nation's Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, to create a legally binding treaty on marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons.

This treaty should include:

High common standards for the marking of all small arms and light weapons

Provisions for marking and tracing ammunition

Ways of strengthening governments' capacities to implement the treaty's measures

Detailed international standards for record-keeping on arms transfers, with Governments required to keep accurate records of arms and ammunition manufactured, held and transferred in and out of their countries, and having access to manufacturer's records

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