

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Arms trade to Middle East and North Africa shows failure of export controls

The USA, Russia and European countries supplied large quantities of weapons to repressive governments in the Middle East and North Africa before this year's uprisings despite having evidence of a substantial risk that they could be used to commit serious human rights violations, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

Arms Transfers to the Middle East and North Africa: Lessons For an Effective Arms Trade Treaty examines arms transfers to Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen since 2005.

"These findings highlight the stark failure of existing arms export controls, with all their loopholes, and underline the need for an effective global Arms Trade Treaty that takes full account of the need to uphold human rights," said Helen Hughes, Amnesty International's principal arms trade researcher on the report.

"Governments that now say they stand in solidarity with people across the Middle East and North Africa are the very same as those who until recently supplied the weapons, bullets and military and police equipment that were used to kill, injure and arbitrarily detain thousands of peaceful protesters in states such as Tunisia and Egypt and are even now being deployed by security forces in Syria and Yemen."

The main arms suppliers to the five countries included in the report were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the UK and the USA.

At least 11 states have provided military assistance or allowed exports of weaponry, munitions and related equipment to Yemen, where some 200 protesters have lost their lives in 2011. These include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine, the UK and the USA.

Despite the continued brutal crackdown against protesters, the international community has failed to take strong action to stem arms transfers to Yemen.

Obtaining arms data for Syria is difficult as few governments officially report on their arms trade with the Syrian government. But it is known that the biggest arms supplier to Syria is the Russian Federation with reportedly about 10 per cent of all Russian arms exports going there.

Russia does not publish an annual report on its arms exports meaning that its arms transfers to the region cannot be quantified.

India authorized the supply of armoured vehicles to Syria whilst France sold munitions between 2005 and 2009.

Amnesty International has identified 10 states whose governments licensed the supply of weaponry, munitions and related equipment to Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Gaddafi's Libyan regime since 2005, including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain and the UK.

During the conflict, al-Gaddafi forces have committed war crimes and abuses which may amount to

crimes against humanity.

Spanish cluster submunitions and MAT-120 cargo mortar projectiles, licensed for sale in 2007, were found in Misratah by Amnesty International, when it was being shelled by al-Gaddafi forces earlier this year. This equipment is now prohibited by the Cluster Munitions Convention which Spain signed less than a year after supplying the submunitions to Libya.

Much of the heavy weaponry found in Libya by Amnesty International researchers looks to have been manufactured during the Soviet-era – Russian or Soviet-made, especially the Grad rockets which are inherently indiscriminate and have been widely used by both sides during the conflict. Some of the munitions found were also Chinese, Bulgarian and Italian such as the Type 72 anti-tank mines, rocket fuses and 155mm artillery rounds, respectively.

At least 20 states have sold and supplied small arms, ammunition, tear gas and riot control agents, and other equipment to Egypt. The USA has been the biggest - annually providing \$1.3 billion. Others include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, and Switzerland.

Shotguns were widely used in both Egypt and Bahrain by the security forces with devastating lethal effect.

Amnesty International recognized that the international community has taken some steps this year to restrict international arms transfers to Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. But the organization said that existing arms export controls had failed to prevent the transfer of arms in the preceding years.

"Arms embargos are usually a case of 'too little too late' when faced with human rights crises," said Helen Hughes.

"What the world needs is rigorous case by case evaluation of each proposed arms transfer so that if there is a substantial risk that the arms are likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious human rights violations, then the government must show the red stop light."

"This proactive 'Golden Rule' is already in the UN draft paper for the Arms Trade Treaty talks which resume at the United Nations in February. If the major arms exporters fail to adopt the Golden Rule, and recklessly continue a 'business as usual' approach, fuelling human rights crises as we have witnessed across the Middle East and North African region this year, it will needlessly shatter lives and undermine global security."

Notes to editors

Amnesty International **spokespeople** are available on this report from New York from London. To arrange interviews, please contact the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 (0) 20 7413 5566 or email press@amnesty.org

Amnesty International is holding a **briefing** on this report at the UN in New York on Thursday 20 October at which media are welcome. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the UN are co-sponsoring. <mailto:>

When: Thursday 20 October, 1.15-2.45, Lunch Time Event

Where: Conference Room 4, North Lawn Building, NY UN

Chair: Ivan Simonovic, OHCHR

Panel: Helen Hughes (Amnesty International Arms Trade Researcher)

Said Boumedouha (Amnesty International Middle East & North Africa researcher)

Clare da Silva (Legal Adviser to Amnesty International on the Arms Trade Treaty)