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UN: tougher measures needed on export of small arms and light weapons

In an open letter to the United Nations Security Council ahead of the Open Debate on Small Arms and Light Weapons which will be held on 11 October, Amnesty International called for tougher measures to control the export and use of small arms and light weapons.

"Whilst we welcome the attention given to this important subject by the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General in his recent report, we are nevertheless concerned that the UN's recommendations on this subject do not go far enough on the key areas of supply and misuse of small arms".

Amnesty International believes that the Security Council should *explicitly* urge States when establishing export control measures, to include mechanisms to ensure that small arms and light weapons are not exported to countries unless it can be demonstrated that such arms transfers will not contribute to serious human rights violations and/or violations of international humanitarian law.

In particular, where there is no embargo on arms exports to parties in armed conflict, export controls based on the upholding of international human rights and international humanitarian law are absolutely vital. Amnesty International, together with a Commission of Nobel Laureates, has drawn up a draft Arms Treaty based on existing law which would require states to regulate arms transactions according to international law.

The misuse of small arms and light weapons that already exists in areas of conflict also needs to be tackled. Amnesty International believes that the Security Council should urge Member States to base their public security and law enforcement systems upon the established principles of international standards on the use of force and firearms, such as the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. All too often Member States do not provide sufficient training, oversight and accountability mechanisms to ensure that these standards are adhered to.

The Security Council should call on the international community to provide assistance to states undergoing post-conflict reconstruction to ensure that these systems are established. It should also commit itself to including the development of these systems in United Nations peacekeeping operation mandates where appropriate.

Amnesty International would also like to see the Security Council take steps to ensure transparency around transfers of small arms and light weapons. In particular Amnesty International believes that the Security Council should explicitly call on Member States to include detailed information of arms transfers in regional registers as well as in the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the United Nations standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures. States should be urged to publish comprehensive and detailed annual reports on arms transfers and identify and set up mechanisms to ensure effective parliamentary scrutiny of their arms transfer policy. The Security Council should also call on Member States to cooperate to establish systems for adequate and reliable marking and tracing of arms.

Finally, Amnesty International calls on the Security Council to urge Member States to maintain strict national registration of each arms manufacturer, dealer, broker, transporter and financier, even where they are only arranging deliveries through "third countries". Licences for production, export, brokerage, transport of small arms and for financing these activities should only be issued to those on this register. Those convicted of criminal offences involving money laundering, trafficking and firearms-related violence should be removed from the register.

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