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Nobel Peace Laureates press Obama on Arms Trade Treaty

US President Barack Obama must take the lead in securing a strong global Arms Trade Treaty, a group of 18 Nobel Peace Prize winners said in an [open letter](#) delivered to their fellow laureate at the White House today.

Amnesty International, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Dr. Óscar Arias Sánchez are among the Nobel Laureates, who also include leaders on human rights, humanitarian and disarmament issues from Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa.

The letter was delivered ahead of talks starting on 18 March at the UN in New York to conclude the negotiations on an historic treaty aimed at bringing the poorly regulated global arms trade under control.

“The US and other arms supplier states have both a moral duty and a national security interest to help achieve [a strong] Treaty in order to protect human rights and save the lives of innocent civilians caught in the crosshairs of conflicts fuelled by the irresponsible international conventional weapons trade,” the Nobel Laureates said in the letter.

“We cannot accept the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are gunned down each year, with millions left maimed and traumatized,” they continued.

“The challenge before us is not just to get a document signed,” said Dr. Óscar Arias Sánchez, former President of Costa Rica and 1987 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. “The challenge before us is to do justice to victims of violence. The challenge before us is to ensure that our goal becomes reality. These men and women and children deserve nothing less than swift and effective action.”

The poorly regulated international trade in conventional arms – worth well more than US\$70 billion annually – fuels conflict, violence, and serious violations of human rights, with devastating effects on health, security, and sustainable social and economic development.

The current absence of legally binding international rules to strictly regulate the global trade in conventional arms represents a “colossal failure” of the international community, according to the letter.

“As an African physician, I have seen too much personal human suffering from gun violence. Multiplied worldwide, the unregulated arms trade results in a global public health catastrophe,” said Dr. Robert Mtonga, co-president of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize laureate International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

“A strong Arms Trade Treaty will be a huge step forward in preventing further unnecessary injury and death from armed violence. President Obama’s support will enhance the prospects for achieving this urgent humanitarian agreement.”

Amnesty International has repeatedly flagged the need for a Golden Rule in the Arms Trade Treaty to

require states to stop an international arms transfer that is likely to contribute to war crimes and other serious human rights violations. The human rights movement has been working for almost two decades to secure an Arms Trade Treaty with human rights protections at its core.

As the world's largest arms exporter by far the USA, under Obama, is uniquely positioned to play a leading role in delivering a strong treaty.

“When the Nobel Committee awarded President Obama the peace prize in 2009, it was to recognize his aspiration for positive change in his country and the world – this treaty is a litmus test for the US President to show that he can deliver a credible global instrument to rein in the irresponsible activities of the international arms trade,” said Brian Wood, Head of Arms Control and Human Rights at Amnesty International.

“Every capital around the world will be watching and waiting – millions of lives are being ruined every year by the global arms trade fuelling atrocities and abuses, and the survivors have had enough. World opinion will not accept a watered-down treaty with loopholes.”