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Control Arms Coalition: Time to get serious on the Arms Trade Treaty

New York : Campaigners today called on governments meeting at the United Nations to ensure no weapons or munitions are sold to human rights abusers. The call came as delegates meet this week to resume negotiations on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), a legally-binding treaty to regulate the global arms trade.

“The killings and injuring of peaceful demonstrators in the Middle East and North Africa show the urgent need for stringent controls on a wide range of arms that are likely to harm innocent citizens. Governments of arms producing countries need to understand that people will no longer accept the free-for-all in selling their weapons to leaders who have no shame in using them against their own citizens,” said Salah Abdellaoui of Amnesty International.

Top of the agenda will be discussions around the criteria against which transfers of arms should either be authorized or denied. Campaigners stress that if there is a substantial risk that weapons, munitions or related equipment will be used for serious human rights violations, the sale of arms should not be authorized.

Campaigners say the UN Security Council has done the right thing by imposing a strong arms embargo on Libya, which includes a wide range of weapons, ammunition, equipment and types of transfers. In order to avoid further such tragedies, the world urgently needs a preventive tool. Therefore states must ensure that the Arms Trade Treaty currently under negotiation will build on this important precedent.

Governments will be discussing what should be part of an ATT. Control Arms campaigners stress that all weapons, munitions and related equipment – from armored vehicles, missiles and aircraft through to small arms, grenades and ammunition – for the use of force in military, police and internal security operations enforcement must be covered if the Treaty is to be effective in saving lives and preventing grave human rights abuses.

The importance of international cooperation and the need for assistance amongst countries to make the treaty work effectively will also be on the ‘to-do’ list of negotiators.

“The time where our governments and companies could operate without any legally-binding rules is coming to an end. It is ridiculous that there are Treaties to regulate the sale of everything from dinosaur bones to postage stamps, but not deadly weapons. Those who export arms irresponsibly need to know their trading days are numbered. It’s time to put the arms trade under control,” said Anna Macdonald of Oxfam.

One person every minute dies as a result of armed violence, with thousands more injured and abused every day, according to estimates of the Control Arms Campaign, an international network of civil society from around the world.

“We hope that this week we will see the development of a Treaty text laying out in detail what common standards governments will have to implement in future. It is vital that this happens considering that we are halfway through the negotiations and there is not a lot of time left,” said Baffour Amoa of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

There are currently no comprehensive, legally binding international rules governing the trade in conventional arms, and gaps and loopholes in regional and national controls allow guns, bullets, tanks, missiles and rockets to end up in conflict zones and in the hands of those who commit war crimes, grave human rights abuses and other systemic forms of armed violence.