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Control Arms campaign: UN General Assembly votes for historic Arms Trade Treaty proposal

Control Arms campaign: Oxfam International, Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

Work on an international Arms Trade Treaty will begin immediately following a historic vote in the UN General Assembly today, which saw 153 governments supporting the proposed Treaty to prevent international arms transfers that fuel conflict, poverty and serious human rights violations. Only the United States voted against the proposal, and 24 governments abstained.

The UN General Assembly vote comes just three years after the launch of the Control Arms campaign, which has seen over a million people in 170 countries calling for a Treaty.

Three quarters of governments voted in favour of the proposal, which was also supported by an overwhelming majority of governments in the UN General Assembly's First Committee in October.

There was also strong support from the governments of Europe as well as the Pacific and Latin America.

"Significant support for an Arms Trade Treaty has come from some of the world's most gun-affected regions; this indicates not only widespread recognition of the problem but also widespread political will to take action," said Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA.

The US remained the only government to vote against the proposal, despite a recent appeal from 14 US Senators to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the Administration to reconsider its position.

"My current visit to Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories has allowed me to see first hand the devastating consequences on civilians of the unregulated trade in weapons. It is vital that governments recognise the urgent need to turn this vote into meaningful action and ensure that a legally binding treaty on conventional arms becomes a reality," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

One of the first tasks for the incoming UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, will be to begin canvassing the views of all UN Member States on the proposed Arms Trade Treaty in order to report back to the General Assembly in late 2007. A group of governmental experts from around the world will then be established to examine the issue in detail and report back to the UN General Assembly in 2008.

"Today, we have seen an overwhelming majority of the world's governments accepting the need for an Arms Trade Treaty to prevent weapons sales that fuel conflict and poverty. That is a historic step. When the Control Arms campaign began in 2003 only 5 governments supported the concept of an Arms Trade Treaty. Today there are 153.

Now governments must follow through and achieve a strong, effective Treaty. Every day that they delay is another day when thousands of lives are wrecked by armed violence," said
Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

Notes to Editors

About the campaign

The idea for the establishment of globally binding rules on arms transfers began in 1995 with a few Nobel Peace Laureates including Amnesty International and Dr Oscar Arias. The Control Arms campaign was launched by Oxfam International, Amnesty International and IANSA in 2003 and so far enjoys the support of over a million campaigners worldwide.

Senators Appeal to US Administration

On 1 December 2006 the office of Senator Dianne Feinstein of California sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asking for the US Administration to change its position on the Arms Trade Treaty resolution.

The letter was signed by the following 14 Democratic Senators: Sen. Dianne Feinstein (California), in-coming Chairwoman of Senate Appropriations Committee on Military Construction and Veteran Affairs, Sen. Patrick Leahy (Vermont), in-coming Chairman of the Senate, Judiciary Committee and Appropriations Subcommittee on the State Department and Foreign Operations; Sen. Jim Jeffords (Vermont); Sen. Dick Durbin (Illinois), In-coming Majority Whip; Sen. John Kerry (Massachusetts); Sen. Carl Levin (Michigan), in-coming Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee; Sen. Barbara Boxer (California), member of the Foreign Relations Committee; Sen. Daniel Akaka (Hawaii), in-coming Chairman of Veteran Affairs Committee; Sen. Frank Lautenberg (New Jersey); Sen. Byron Dorgan (North Dakota); Sen. Russ Feingold (Wisconsin), member of the Foreign Relations Committee; Sen. Barbara Mikulski (Maryland); Sen. Jeff Bingaman (New Mexico), in-coming Chairman of Senate Committee on the Environment; Sen. Tom Harkin (Iowa).

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