

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

FACT SHEET

AI index: ACT 30/016/2013
4 March 2013

Timeline of Arms Trade Treaty Campaign Landmarks

1993 and 1994 – Four individuals from Amnesty International and three small NGOs (the British American Security Information Council, Saferworld UK and the World Development Movement UK) discuss and draw up a proposal for legally binding Code to control arms transfers to respect human rights and other principles of international law, and lawyers from Cambridge and Essex University in the UK assist in drafting the text.

1995 to 1999 – Amnesty International joins Dr Oscar Arias, other Nobel Peace Prize laureates and a few smaller NGOs to draft and call for a “legally binding International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers”.

May 1998 – Responding to the Nobel Peace laureates and NGO campaign, the European Union agrees an EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports with a human rights criterion, but the Code is not a legally binding treaty.

1997 and 1998 – Also responding to the campaign, US Senator John Kerry and Representatives Cynthia McKinney and Dana Rohrabacher introduce three versions of the Code of Conduct in the US House and Senate respectively.

1999 – US Senator John Kerry wins adoption by Congress of the International Arms Sales Code of Conduct Act mandating the US President to negotiate the establishment of an international regime to promote global transparency on arms transfers and to limit, restrict, or prohibit arms transfers to countries that do not observe certain fundamental values of human liberty, peace, and international stability.

November 2000 – All UN Member States are given a revised draft legally binding International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers in a new document circulated at the UN by Dr Oscar Arias, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, José Ramos Horta, Amnesty International and other Nobel Peace laureates and NGOs.

2000 and 2001 – Amnesty International, NGO policy experts and Cambridge University lawyers draft international legal principles for a “Framework Convention on International Arms Transfers” and begin promoting the new text with friendly governments.

October 2003 – Amnesty International, Oxfam and IANSA launch the Control Arms campaign for a global “Arms Trade Treaty” (ATT) in more than a hundred countries. Over the next two and a half years support for an ATT grows from just a handful of governments to more than 50, including the UK as the first Permanent Member of the UN Security Council to support the ATT initiative and all member states of the European Union.

June 2006 – the Control Arms campaign hands over its “Million Faces” petition to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan calling on leaders to back the ATT to establish stricter controls on the international arms trade.

July 2006 – Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the UK draft and then circulate a United Nations General Assembly resolution “Towards an Arms Trade Treaty”.

December 2006 – 153 States at the UN General Assembly vote in favour of a resolution calling on the UN Secretary General to “seek the views of Member States on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument...” There are 24 abstentions and only the USA votes against the resolution.

2007 – As the UN Secretary General seeks the views of States, Amnesty International and its Control Arms partners hold more than 100 “people's consultation” events around the world to convince governments to support an effective ATT.

October 2009 – The Obama Administration declares US support for an ATT, reversing the opposition of the previous Bush Administration, but only on condition the treaty is adopted by consensus in the UN.

December 2009 – 153 UN member states vote in favour of starting a formal UN process including a series of five preparatory meetings leading to the Arms Trade Treaty negotiating conference in July 2012.

2010 and 2011 – The preparatory meetings result in an ever stronger outcome document from the UN Chair - which is supposed to reflect an overwhelming majority of Member States. The Chair's draft paper eventually includes a key proposal by Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross that where there exists a substantial risk that an international arms transfer is likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights law or International Humanitarian Law, the transfer will not be authorized.

February 2012 – At the fifth and final UN preparatory meeting ahead of July's negotiation conference, the UN Chair's draft paper is accepted as a starting document for the negotiations.

July 2012 – A month-long Diplomatic Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty at the UN ends with a draft treaty text, but states fail to adopt it, with several – including the USA, Russia and China – asking for more time.

November 2012 – 157 UN member states vote in favour of holding a "Final UN Conference on the ATT" in March 2013 on the basis of consensus in order to "complete" the treaty text.

March 2013 – “Final UN Conference on the ATT” will be held in New York from 18-28 March 2013.

/ENDS