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Growing network of arms brokers and transporters fuelling killings, rape, and torture

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Chronically weak and outdated arms controls urgently need strengthening to stop an ever-expanding chain of arms brokers, logistic firms and transporters from fuelling massive human rights abuse around the world, according to a new report issued today.

The report from Amnesty International and TransArms shows how increasingly sophisticated freight transport and brokering operations now deliver hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons around the world with an ever-greater proportion going to developing countries where they have fed some of the most brutal of conflicts.

The report, *Dead on Time - arms transportation, brokering and the threat to human rights*, reveals the involvement of arms brokers and transporters from the Balkans, China, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and the USA. It also shows how this network of middlemen has made it easier for the major arms suppliers to target developing countries, which now absorb over two-thirds of world defence imports, compared to just over half in the 1990s.

“Arms brokers and transport agents have helped deliver many of the weapons used in the ongoing killing, rape and displacement of civilians in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Yet customs controls are often weak and, even now, only about 35 states have bothered to enact arms brokerage laws, making further human rights catastrophes all but inevitable,” said Brian Wood, Amnesty International’s research manager for the arms and security trade.

Amnesty International’s report illustrates the unregulated, secretive and unaccountable nature of many arms transporting and brokering operations with a series of case studies including:

Hundreds of thousands of weapons and millions of rounds of ammunition from Bosnia and Herzegovina’s war-time stockpiles exported clandestinely under the auspices of the US Department of Defense; the shipments, supposedly to Iraq, used a chain of private brokers and transport contractors including an air cargo company that violated a UN arms embargo on Liberia;
A huge shipment by a Dutch-UK firm of ammunition and explosives from a Brazilian manufacturer to

Saudi Arabia and Mauritius seized by South African authorities because it had no transshipment licence;
Brazil authorised the arms export despite the pattern of grave human rights violations committed in Saudi Arabia;

The sea freighting of large quantities of arms to Liberia from China by a Dutch arms broker in contravention of a UN arms embargo on Liberia and despite evidence of the widespread killing, rape and displacement of thousands of civilians.

The report also highlights a number of cases where the services of private contractors who have been involved in illegal arms shipments have also been employed to support UN peacekeeping missions and deliveries of humanitarian aid at tax-payers' expense.

"It is clear that the existing patchwork of regulations are completely failing to keep pace with the expanding number and reach of international brokers, logistic firms and transporters. Such intermediaries may ensure that shipments of arms around the world arrive dead on time, but all too often they are used for the killing, rape, torture and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people," said Sergio Finardi of TransArms.

In its report, Amnesty International also makes a series of recommendations for robust and strictly enforced arms controls based on consistent international laws including:

Immediate establishment of specific national laws, regulations and administrative procedures to prevent arms brokering, logistics and transport activities contributing to gross human rights violations;
Development of an international protocol to regulate arms brokering and transport agents according to a common set of ethical standards set out in a global arms trade treaty;
Making violations of UN arms embargoes a criminal offence in all states and in the case of serious violations, a crime with universal jurisdiction;
Stepping up international donor aid to enhance customs and other law enforcement control of cargo movements.

For a copy of the executive summary of the report, *Dead on Time*, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engact300072006>

For a copy of the full report, *Dead on Time*, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engact300082006>

Note to Editors

Amnesty International coordinates the Control Arms campaign with Oxfam International and IANSA. It campaigns to reduce arms proliferation and misuse in over 100 countries. See: www.controlarms.org. TransArms is a small independent research group focussing on the logistics of the international arms trade.

Public Document

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