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Nobel Peace Prize Laureates urge governments to vote for an Arms Trade Treaty at the UN tomorrow

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

On the eve of a historic vote to begin work on an Arms Trade Treaty in the UN General Assembly's First Committee, 15 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates including the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Oscar Arias and Amnesty International have called on governments to support the Treaty in order to stop irresponsible arms exports "which are causing the peoples of the world so much pain and destruction". The appeal is contained in a letter released today at the UN.

The majority of the world's governments have announced that they will champion the resolution to start work on the Treaty, ahead of a vote expected tomorrow, Wednesday 25 October. These governments include three of the top six arms exporters: UK, France and Germany; several emerging arms exporters including Brazil, Bulgaria and Ukraine; and many countries that have been devastated by armed violence including Colombia, East Timor, Haiti, Liberia and Rwanda. Among those unlikely to vote 'yes' are China, Egypt, India, Iran, Russia and the United States.

If the resolution is passed tomorrow, it would be the first concrete step towards a global treaty to close current loopholes in regulations that allow conventional weapons to fuel conflict, grave human rights violations and undermine development.

"We Nobel Peace Laureates know that the main principle behind a global Arms Trade Treaty is simple and unstoppable: no weapons should ever be transferred if they will be used for serious violations of human rights. It is crunch time at the UN: governments should take an historic step to stop irresponsible and immoral arms transfers by voting to develop a treaty that will prevent the death, rape and displacement of thousands of people," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"The majority of the world's governments have already championed the resolution to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty. As a result, we are increasingly confident it will go through, meaning that the first, crucial step towards achieving a Treaty will be made. Now, it is vital that every government who wants to see an end to the needless suffering caused by the unregulated arms trade turns up and votes 'yes' at the UN tomorrow," said Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

"It is time for all wavering governments to join the moral majority and vote to set up a process to establish a global Arms Trade Treaty. A thousand people die every day on average and many more are harmed as a result of the proliferation and misuse of small arms. The world can no longer leave civilians to the mercy of gunrunners, arms brokers and exporters who are profiting by their misery," said Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA.

The resolution to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty has been co-authored by the governments of Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the United Kingdom. If passed, it would set up a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to look at the feasibility, scope and parameters of an Arms Trade Treaty and to report back to the First Committee in 2008.

Notes to editors

Footage showing the devastating effects of armed violence around the world is available on request.

Spokespeople, including survivors of armed violence, are available for interviews in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Swahili.

The Control Arms campaign consists of Amnesty International, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and Oxfam International, who are working together to campaign for a global Arms Trade Treaty based on respect for international law, especially human rights and humanitarian law. The campaign has been working towards this vote for the past three years and has the support of over a million people worldwide.

The Nobel Peace Prizes Laureates letter is an initiative of the Oscar Arias Foundation and is supported by the Control Arms campaign.

The letter has been signed by the following Nobel Laureates:

American Friends Service Committee, Amnesty International, Oscar Arias (current president of Costa Rica, one of the seven authors of the resolution), Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Dalai Lama, Shirin Ebadi, Mohamed ElBaradei, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Rigoberta Menchu, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, José Ramos Horta, Desmond Tutu, Lech Walesa, Betty Williams, Jody Williams.

For a copy of the letter see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engpol300522006>

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