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Arms Trade Talks: Political chess games at UN risk millions of lives

Leaders currently seeking a veto over an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) must stop playing chess with millions of innocent lives, Amnesty International said today.

The call came in the wake of a week-long meeting at the United Nations, hammering out details for the final ATT negotiation in July.

Several governments including Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and Syria have in effect sought to secure a veto over any agreement. Others are attempting to water down safeguards in the treaty that could protect human rights.

“We cannot allow a few governments to hold humanity to ransom over something as important as the ATT,” said Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International. “It is particularly appalling when these are governments that have demonstrated their willingness to use weapons against their own people.”

“These talks are a historic opportunity to secure an international agreement to stop arms from being sent where there is a significant risk they will be used against civilians. This agreement could save lives and protect human rights.”

Serious human rights abuses have been committed around the world using a wide range of arms. Millions of people have been killed, injured, raped and forced to flee from their homes as a result in countries as diverse as Mexico, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and Pakistan.

Amnesty International is demanding a treaty which will prevent international arms transfers where there is a substantial risk they will be used to commit or facilitate serious human rights violations. But such an outcome is under threat as several governments look to create rules for the July talks that would limit the extent of the treaty.

States including China, Russia, and the USA are rejecting the inclusion of strong human rights safeguards. Others that are generally supportive of such safeguards, like the UK, have yet to provide a guarantee they will demand that they are included in the final agreement.

“Over the years there has been much resistance from governments to a strong ATT but each time they could not ignore the voices of millions of people across the world,” said Salil Shetty.

“But as we have seen in the last year, people are willing to demand their rights and confront those who would use these arms to repress them. We must ensure these voices are heard in New York in July.”

Amnesty International recently highlighted how the USA, Russia and some European countries supplied large quantities of weapons to repressive governments in the Middle East and North Africa before last year’s uprisings, despite having evidence that they could be used to commit serious human rights violations.

Only last week, Amnesty International highlighted how Russian and Chinese arms supplies to Sudan were fuelling the ongoing violence and mass displacement of people in Darfur.

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has been at the forefront of the campaign for an effective Arms Trade Treaty. A delegation was in New York to lobby government officials on the need for an agreement that

protects human rights.

Amnesty International was among civil society organizations that launched the Control Arms campaign in 2003. Three years later, 153 governments finally voted at the UN to develop a global Arms Trade Treaty. The July talks are the final stage of a decade long campaign.

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Notes to editors

Amnesty International experts on the Arms Trade Treaty are available for interview

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