

AI Index: PRE 01/320/2012
02 July 2012

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International artists including Keira Knightley, Yoko Ono, Scarlett Johansson, Coldplay, Tim Roth, Annie Lennox and Kevin Spacey have joined forces to demand governments take immediate action to help improve regulation of the international arms trade.

Later today, representatives from more than 190 governments meet in New York for the first day of a month-long negotiation at the United Nations to agree an Arms Trade Treaty, which will control the supply of weapons, ammunition and armaments.

An effective Arms Trade Treaty would be based on a “Golden Rule”: if there is a substantial risk that arms exported to another country are likely to be used for serious human rights abuses; violations of international humanitarian law; or to undermine sustainable development, those arms supplies must be stopped.

More than 30 high-profile Oxfam and Amnesty International supporters including Paul Conroy - the British war photographer injured in the mortar attack that killed Sunday Times reporter Marie Colvin and French photo journalist Remi Ochlik, in Homs, Syria, earlier this year – have urged governments to deliver a strong and effective treaty that helps protect human rights by preventing the flow of arms to irresponsible users.

The letter has been sent to the UN Secretary-General, who will play a vital role in the negotiations, by keeping the talks on track to deliver a strong treaty that will really save lives.

The letter states:

“Every year an average of two bullets for every person on this planet is produced. With so few global rules governing the arms trade, no one really knows where all those bullets will end up – or whose lives they will tear apart.

“Under the current system, there are less global controls on the sales of ammunition and guns than on bananas and bottled water. It’s a ridiculous situation.

“As supporters of Amnesty International and Oxfam, we urge governments to step forward and deliver a robust, effective treaty that protects human rights. A treaty that puts a stop to the needless deaths and injuries which occur every day as a result of armed violence and conflict. The decisions taken around this treaty really are a matter of life and death.”

The deadly and poorly regulated trade in arms leads to serious human rights abuses, armed violence, conflict, poverty and organized crime around the world.

The lack of clear binding principles governing decisions on international arms transfers combined with patchy diverse and poorly implemented national regulations are inadequate to deal with the increasingly globalised nature of the arms trade. As a result, irresponsible users are allowed to violate international humanitarian and human rights law.

Colombian rock band Los Aterciopelados said:

“In Colombia, for decades civilians have been victims of armed conflict. Displacement and violence are everyday occurrences. The ceaseless flow of arms fuels this terrible reality. But this isn't just the story of our country. It's vital that leaders implement a strong Arms Trade Treaty. It is urgently needed that they control arms to protect human rights.”

Anna Macdonald, Oxfam's Head of Control Arms, said:

“This impressive range of public figures from many walks of life urging governments to sign-up to a robust treaty this month underlines the importance of the treaty negotiations.

“This is a critical moment. The world has never before agreed to have a set of international rules on the arms trade. This is a chance of a lifetime, a chance of a generation, to make a difference by stopping the trade flows of arms going into the wrong hands.”

Brian Wood, Amnesty International's Manager of Arms Control, Security Trade and Human Rights

“These are big voices echoing a global civil society message to world leaders that is clear: seize this historic opportunity to agree a Golden Rule to make a strong arms trade treaty that can stamp out irresponsible arms trading, stop shattering the lives of millions and help protect everyone's human rights.”

Notes to Editors

The full list of signatories includes:

Gillian Anderson Actor, USA.

Los Aterciopelados Musicians, Colombia.

Harry Belafonte Singer, songwriter, actor and social activist, USA.

Gael Garcia Bernal Actor, Mexico.

Paul Bettany Actor, UK.

Jane Birkin Actor/Singer, UK.

Miguel Bose Singer, Spain.

Rahul Bose Actor, India.

Helena Christensen Photographer and model, Denmark.

Chris Martin, Guy Berryman, Jonny Buckland, Will Champion Members of Coldplay – Rock band, UK.

Jennifer Connelly Actor, USA.

Paul Conroy War photographer, UK.

Sophie Dahl Writer and model, UK.

Kristin Davis Actor, USA.

Andrea Echiverri Musician, singer and guitarist, Colombia.

Los Fabulosos Cadillacs Musicians, Argentina.

Livia Firth Film Producer and Eco-Age Creative Director, UK.

Anjelica Huston Actor, USA.

Eddie Izzard Comedian, actor and writer, UK.

Bianca Jagger Chair of Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation, UK.

Emmanuel Jal Musician and activist, South Sudan

Scarlett Johansson Actor, USA.

Angelique Kidjo Singer, Benin.

Keira Knightley Actor, UK.

Annie Lennox Singer/songwriter, UK.

Baaba Maal Singer/musician, Senegal.

Bill Nighy Actor, UK.

Yoko Ono Artist, author and peace activist, Japan.

Emma Pooley Olympic cyclist, UK.

Tim Roth Actor and director, UK.

Kevin Spacey Actor, director and producer, US.

Dave Stewart Musician and record producer, UK.

Imelda Staunton Actor, UK.

Vivienne Westwood Fashion designer, UK

Ends