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A “Golden Rule” on human rights is essential for an effective Arms Trade Treaty

As UN member states meet in October to consider moving towards negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty, a new detailed report by Amnesty International urges world leaders to adopt a “Golden Rule” on human rights. This rule states simply that governments must prevent arms transfers where there is a substantial risk that they are likely to be used for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

In the run up to October’s UN discussions, a few states - - including China, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Russia and the USA - - are attempting to block, delay and water down proposals, which could make the treaty fail in its objectives and allow the continued unchecked trade in arms.

“Despite the massive green light from most of the world community, a small minority of sceptics want to keep the status quo shambles so they can turn a blind eye to blatantly irresponsible arms transfers, rendering most national arms controls and UN arms embargoes weak and ineffective,” said Brian Wood, Amnesty International’s arms control manager.

The report [*Blood at the Crossroads: Making the case for a global arms trade treaty*](#) is the first detailed examination of the parameters and scope of such a treaty using nine detailed case studies of the catastrophic human rights consequences of unrestrained arms trading. From the ongoing conflict in Darfur, military crackdowns in Myanmar and Guinea to the proliferation of sectarian violence in Iraq, the report shows how and why the current variation and loopholes in national arms legislation allows massive violations of human rights to occur. The report demonstrates that without an effective human rights provision, a global Arms Trade Treaty could fail to protect those most vulnerable.

“Discussions on an Arms Trade Treaty have reached a crossroads. Governments can either carry on ignoring the horrific consequences of irresponsible international arms transfers or they can meet their obligations in an Arms Trade Treaty with a “Golden Rule” on human rights that will actually help save people’s lives and protect their livelihoods,” adds Helen Hughes one of the researcher of the report.

China, Russia and the USA, amongst many other nations, are highlighted in the report as trading arms to countries with well documented human rights violations. The report uses the detailed case studies of Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Guatemala, Guinea, Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan & Chad and Uganda to demonstrate how and why a “Golden Rule” is essential to making an Arms Trade Treaty work:

- China and Russia remain the largest suppliers of conventional arms to Sudan which are used for serious ongoing human rights violations by the Sudanese armed forces in Darfur. Russia supplied military helicopters and bomber aircraft, while China sold Sudan most of its arms and ammunition
- In Iraq, the US Department of Defense has funded most of the supply of over one million rifles, pistols and infantry weapons for 531,000 Iraqi security force personnel in a poorly managed and

unaccountable process since 2003. This supply has compounded the massive proliferation of arms and gross human rights abuses which began under the former Saddam government. The new supplies have sometimes involved dubious players in international supply chains and a basic lack of accountability by the Iraq, US and UK governments, leading to diversions of supplies to armed groups and illicit markets.

- In Myanmar, despite the persistent pattern of well-documented human rights violations committed by Myanmar government forces, China, Serbia, Russia and the Ukraine have between them supplied armoured personal carriers, trucks, weapons and munitions, while India has recently offered to supply more arms.

The report shows graphically how violations of UN arms embargoes continue on Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia and Darfur in Sudan because of weak national laws and lack of commitment and capacity by some governments, making the case for an effective treaty even stronger. The failure of over 80 per cent of states to establish laws to control arms brokering and arms transportation makes this problem worse.

“The time for an Arms Trade Treaty is now. Sixty years after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the same governments can and should deliver an effective agreement on international arms transfers with human rights at its heart.”

Background

An historic vote at the UN General Assembly in December 2006 saw 153 governments vote for a resolution to start working towards a global arms trade treaty. There was one vote against (USA), with 24 abstentions (Bahrain, Belarus, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lao, Libya, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, UAE, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe).

Amnesty International has joined with Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) to set up the Control Arms campaign. The campaign calls for an international Arms Trade Treaty that could save thousands of lives and hold irresponsible arms dealers to account. Since it started in October 2003, Control Arms has gathered the support of more than one million people worldwide.

Saturday 13 to Friday 19 September 2008 is Arms Trade Treaty Week of Action. More than 50 countries will be hosting events related to this campaigning Week of Action, with activities to remind governments that ‘The World is Watching’. There is also a viral game pressing governments to support an effective arms trade treaty – <http://www.controlarms.org/en/games/catch-bombs>

For details of events and materials, see the Control Arms website at www.controlarms.org