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States must agree an Arms Trade Treaty that could help save a life a minute

New York: States must use every available minute to draw up a new international arms treaty that could save thousands of lives every year, NGOs from around the world said today as negotiators from 192 governments begin formal talks at the United Nations on Monday.

One person every minute dies as a result of armed violence, with thousands more injured and abused every day, according to the Control Arms Campaign, an international network of civil society from around the world. 128 armed conflicts since 1989 have resulted in at least 250,000 deaths each year.

The Control Arms Campaign calls on governments to commit real diplomatic resources towards drafting a robust and effective treaty to control the conventional arms trade. A legally binding deal that covers all weapons, ammunition and related equipment is urgently needed, the organizations said.

There are currently no comprehensive, legally binding international rules governing the trade in conventional arms, and gaps and loopholes in national controls allow weapons are ending up in conflict zones and in the hands of serious human rights abusers.

“The time for delays and excuses is long gone. Every single country must work to achieve the strongest possible deal to stop arms getting into the hands of human rights abusers and warmongers. We need clear rules that will oversee how states transfer and regulate the trade in arms; this is a no-brainer. By the end of the next two weeks, member states must have made real progress: and this means delivering a draft text”, said Anna Macdonald, Oxfam’s Head of the Arms Control Campaign.

To save lives and protect livelihoods, the treaty must have specific criteria based around international human rights and humanitarian law and sustainable development.

Negotiations are starting four years after the United Nations General Assembly agreed by an overwhelming majority to work toward an Arms Trade Treaty to establish international rules and standards to better regulate the trade. Just four weeks of negotiations – 120 hours of negotiating time – have been allotted by the UN General Assembly to develop the text of the new international instrument before the final negotiating conference in 2012.

“Half of the world’s poorest people live in states that are at risk of, or experiencing, violent conflict. Conventional arms, especially small arms, light weapons and associated ammunition, are used for the majority of grave human rights violations. Now is the time for an Arms Trade Treaty that really protects people, not just states”, said Daniel Mack, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Arms Control, Instituto Sou da Paz, São Paulo.

The vast majority of governments in Africa, the Americas, Europe and Asia have voted in the UN General Assembly since 2006 for the development of the Treaty, In December 2009, 151 of the UN’s 192 states voted to begin formal negotiations. Around 20 states, however, have persistently abstained in the UN votes on the Arms Trade Treaty.

"A small minority of states, however powerful, should not be allowed to stymie progress in New York over the next two weeks." said Brian Wood, Amnesty International's head of arms control. "The world urgently needs a bullet-proof Arms Trade Treaty to save lives, protect livelihoods and safeguard human rights."

Note:

The most comprehensive global analysis so far conducted of data on deaths in and outside armed conflict as a result of armed violence, carried out by the Geneva Declaration Against Armed Violence in 2008, found that between 2004 and 2008, at least 208,300 violent deaths were recorded in armed conflicts: an average of 52,000 people killed each year. Evidence from epidemiological surveys suggests that between 2004 and 2007 at least 200,000 indirect deaths resulted from armed conflict every year, and probably far more. Finally, an estimated 490,000 non-conflict killings have taken place worldwide each year in recent years, of which an average of 60% - perhaps 300,000 each year – are estimated to have been perpetrated using firearms. These figures are highly likely to be underestimates.

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