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Russian pledge to halt new arms deals to Syria is not enough

Russia is continuing to fail the people of Syria despite reports that it will halt any new arms deals with the al-Assad government in the immediate future, Amnesty International said today.

“If the remarks made by a Russian official are true, this is a feeble announcement. It is not enough for the Russian government to halt new deals with the Syrian government, whilst continuing to honour existing arms contracts. They must immediately stop all arms transfers, including technical assistance, to the Syrian government,” said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director of Middle East and North Africa.

“Whilst Russia continues to block international efforts to find an effective solution to the situation, the people of Syria continue to suffer a bloody cycle of repression and abuse. Many of the weapons previously supplied by Russia and other countries are being used in this assault.”

Amnesty International has called for the imposition of an immediate arms embargo aimed at stopping the transfer of arms to the Syrian government, a Security Council referral of the situation to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

The reports come as crucial negotiations continue at the UN in New York for an Arms Trade Treaty. Russian officials had previously been looking to prevent the treaty from containing strong human rights rules that could help stop future atrocities.

Amnesty International wants to see a ‘Golden Rule’ for regulating arms transfers – at the core of the negotiations on a comprehensive global Arms Trade Treaty.

This rule would require all states considering an international transfer of arms to first carry out a rigorous risk assessment based on objective information to ensure that there is not a substantial risk those arms would be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of human rights, including crimes under international law. If there is a substantial risk of such violations, the transfer must not take place.

Amid growing reports of abuses by members of the armed opposition in Syria, Amnesty International is calling on governments considering the supply of arms to opposition fighters to immediately and strictly apply the ‘Golden Rule.’

Amnesty International is also calling for an adequately resourced human rights monitoring presence in Syria with a strong mandate to monitor, investigate and publicly report on crimes against humanity, war crimes and other grave human rights abuses committed by all sides.