



West Africa Action Network on Small Arms
Réseau d'Action Sur les Légères en Afrique de l'Ouest



MEDIA RELEASE

ECOWAS President: West Africa will support global Arms Trade Treaty

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The President of the ECOWAS Commission today called on West African states to support the global move towards an Arms Trade Treaty. He was speaking at the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit in Abuja, Nigeria.

The call comes during the Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence (11-17 June) when governments, UN agencies and civil society are highlighting the problem of gun violence and discussing preventative measures. The proliferation of small arms and high levels of gun violence in West Africa make the Week of Action particularly relevant to this sub-region.

'West Africa has suffered from gun proliferation and misuse for too many years. The ECOWAS Commission fully endorses the Global Week of Action and urges Member States to submit their views on an Arms Trade Treaty to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, calling for a strong and effective treaty,' said Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, President of the ECOWAS Commission. Dr Chambas was speaking at a press conference held yesterday jointly by the ECOWAS Secretariat and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

'The principles behind the ECOWAS Convention on small arms and the proposed Arms Trade Treaty are very similar – strongly based on protecting human rights, furthering sustainable development and enhancing regional security. Although not all West African governments have submitted their views on an Arms Trade Treaty yet, there is huge support from governments in the sub-region and they have pledged to ensure that this interest is transformed into positive results,' said Conmany Wesseh, Deputy Foreign Minister of Liberia.

So far few governments have ratified the ECOWAS Convention on small arms one year after it was agreed at the last Summit. The Convention complements the Arms Trade Treaty process and experts encouraged governments to ratify swiftly.

'Small arms are West Africa's weapons of mass destruction. Governments in the sub-region must now follow strong words with strong action, especially in promoting a global Arms Trade Treaty that prevents weapons being used to commit atrocities and undermine sustainable development,' said Mimidoo Achakpa, representing the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), a member of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

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Notes to editors:

- The ECOWAS Convention on small arms was adopted in June 2006 at the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit. It is the strongest regional agreement on small arms control in the world. It requires nine ratifications to enter into force and only Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have ratified the Convention.
- Work on a global Arms Trade Treaty started in December 2006 when 153 governments voted in support of the UN Resolution 'Towards an Arms Trade Treaty'. All West African governments

either co-sponsored or voted in support of the resolution, which calls for States to submit their views on an Arms Trade Treaty to the UN Secretary-General. The deadline for submissions is 20 June 2007. So far Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal have submitted their views.

- The West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) are members of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), the global movement against gun violence. IANSA is a network of 700 civil society organisations working in 100 countries to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. More information is at www.iansa.org.
- The Global Week of Action was first held in 2001 and is now the world's largest coordinated gun violence prevention event. This year there are activities in over 50 countries, including nine countries in West Africa (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Konakry, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone).