



Most Governments at UN meeting say they want tough arms control

Control Arms Campaign News Release

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The majority of the world's governments have confirmed they want an Arms Trade Treaty during the UN General Assembly committee sessions on conventional arms which ended today and they have submitted written proposals calling for respect of international human rights and humanitarian law in conventional arms transfers.

Two new analyses* released during the UN debate, which examined what States have told the UN Secretary General, found that most governments are urging respect for human rights when decisions are made about arms transfers. There is also strong support by a majority of governments for provisions to respect international humanitarian law such as the Geneva Conventions and Protocols and a ban on arming terrorist groups.

Other criteria cited by many governments for the new treaty include the prevention of arms transfers where there is a clear risk of diversion, such as to violate international arms embargoes, and if there is a danger the arms will be used in serious crime or have a negative impact on sustainable development.

The Control Arms campaign has applauded an unprecedented show of support for a tough Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) – especially by African states. Amnesty International, the International Action Network on Small Arms and Oxfam International form the Control Arms campaign. Events included the launch of a report on the cost to Africa of armed violence and a panel of military leaders that addressed the UN to express their support for the ATT.

“It has been extraordinary to hear so many governments push for tough international arms controls that could potentially save countless lives around the globe every year. In particular, many African states, where we see some of the world's worst conflicts, stressed the need for arms transfers to be assessed with regard to human rights, international humanitarian law and sustainable development. The unregulated arms trade fuels conflict, poverty and serious human rights abuses,” said Anna Macdonald, Head of Control Arms at Oxfam International.

The next stage in the development of an Arms Trade Treaty will be the work of a group of government experts (GGE) coming from 28 countries, including the world's biggest arms exporters and many of the countries affected by irresponsible arms flows. In February the GGE will begin weaving government submissions into the first blueprint of a future Arms Trade Treaty and will present their report at next year's meeting of the UN General Assembly's First Committee in October.

“Ordinary people should be greatly encouraged that most states now wish to control the flow of conventional weapons which contribute to serious human rights abuses but a few powerful states like the USA, China, Russia and India unfortunately remain sceptical,” said Brian Wood, Head of Arms Control Research at Amnesty International. “153 states voted for the treaty, over 100 have made written submissions, and over 70 states wanted to join the group of experts to shape the treaty.”

All Permanent Members of the Security Council are given seats on such expert groups but the United States has not yet decided whether to take up its assigned seat on the GGE. The USA was the only state which voted against the ATT resolution in the General Assembly in December, when 153 states voted in favour.

Yesterday the USA also voted against a separate UN resolution calling for a Biennial Meeting of States to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons to be held next July which was passed yesterday by 165 votes to 1. The resolution also encourages states to take strong action against arms brokers.

“This resolution demonstrates the overwhelming commitment of UN member states to reduce the global scourge of small arms which is killing around 1,000 people each day. We are looking forward to a constructive and effective Biennial Meeting of States next July,” said Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA.

Ends

Notes to editors:

* UN Institute for Disarmament Research, “Analysis of States’ Views on an Arms Trade Treaty”, October 2007; Amnesty International and NGO partners, “A Global Arms Trade Treaty: What States Want”, October 2007 [AI Index: POL 34/004/2007]

1. In 2006, 153 states voted in favour of an Arms Trade Treaty Resolution at the UN General Assembly, 24 states abstained and only the US voted against.
2. Over 100 States have submitted their view on an Arms Trade Treaty to the UN Secretary General – this is an overwhelming level of response (normally 10-12 would respond) and indicates the high level of support for an ATT.
3. The next stage now is that during 2008 a Group of Governmental Experts, selected by the UN Secretary General, will meet to develop the next stage of the Arms Trade Treaty. These states will be: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States.
4. An Arms Trade Treaty would prevent arms transfers if they are used, or likely to be used, for violations of international law including human rights law and international humanitarian law.
5. Over a million people from 160 countries have joined Control Arms’ “Million Faces” photo petition to show their support for an Arms Trade Treaty.