

10 October 2008

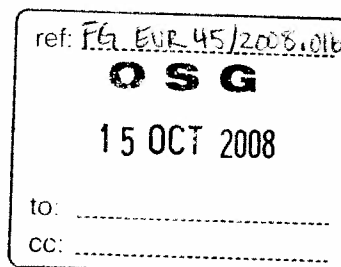
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From the Secretary of State



Jo Franks,

I would like to thank Oxfam, Amnesty International, IANSA and Control Arms for their latest campaign “The World is Watching – Support an Arms Trade Treaty”. I have been immensely impressed by the active support for the ATT that your members are showing.

Let me emphasize from the outset that the British Government strongly supports the UN Process towards a global Arms Trade Treaty. We want a treaty that will ensure that all countries apply consistent, robust arms export controls covering all conventional weapons. A treaty should require respect for human rights, reduce conflict and promote good governance and sustainable development. We made these points early in the UN process, when we submitted to the UN Secretary-General our views on what an ATT should look like. At that time, we stated that ‘the right of states to self-defence is accompanied by the responsibilities of states to prevent threats to peace and to ensure respect for international law, including human rights and humanitarian law’.


This year the UK participated in a series of three meetings bringing together a Group of Governmental Experts selected by the UN to take forward an Arms Trade Treaty. We worked very closely with representatives from NGO’s, including Oxfam, Amnesty International and IANSA, as well as other interested groups from Industry, in developing our strategy to take this important process forward. We also continue to work with our international partners, so that a robust treaty can be agreed as soon as possible.

As a demonstration of my own personal commitment to the ATT, I hosted a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the Arms Trade Treaty on 9th September. The meeting launched the next phase of the ATT process and helped to bring the ATT to the attention of wider group of stakeholders, many of whom had not been involved previously. Senior representatives from business, NGOs (including yourselves), academics and faith groups took part in a lively and interesting debate, looking at how they can help drive forward the UN process towards an ATT. Further details from that meeting are on the FCO website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/att>.

But this is an on-going process, and one meeting alone will not achieve our objective. We need the support of all stakeholders if we are to achieve our ultimate target of a robust legally-binding ATT. This is where your supporters can play a role. This extends beyond reminding Government of our commitments, although it is still good to do this from time to time. You, and all those who took the time to write to me, now have the opportunity to become individual advocates, or should I say “ambassadors” for the ATT, spreading the message that the ATT has the potential to address, in practical terms, many of the problems facing the world. There are many obstacles we still need to overcome, and I do not underestimate the difficulty in persuading those who remain sceptical, but there is a role here for all of us, both Government and activist alike, in propagating the message that an ATT has the potential to do great good.

Picking up the second point in your letter campaign, I too was delighted with the outcome of the Dublin Conference last May. It is worth noting that the Prime Minister played a crucial role in breaking the deadlock, which eventually enabled the new draft Convention on Cluster Munitions to be adopted by over 100 countries. The contribution of civil society was also instrumental in bringing about this positive result.

I believe that the new Convention is strong and will help to make the world a safer place. The Convention will put in place an effective framework, not only to prevent future casualties, but also to provide for international cooperation and assistance to facilitate clearance of contaminated areas and support for victims of cluster munitions. The Government plans to sign the Convention when it opens for signature on 3 December in Oslo. In the meantime the Government has taken a significant step towards implementing the Convention’s norms. Our Armed Forces have ceased to use the two cluster munitions that the UK retained, the M85 and CRV-7 Multi Purpose Sub Munition/M73, and put them into a destruction programme. We have also begun making the necessary changes in export control regulations.

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DAVID MILIBAND