

FROM THE UN

UPDATE ON A GLOBAL ARMS TRADE TREATY

‘The world is over-armed and peace is underfunded’ according to the Secretary General of the UN Ban -Ki Moon. To be precise and succinct the world is awash in weapons. The arms trade is big business. In 2011 it was valued, at \$85 billion. The devastating consequences of the mostly unregulated global trade in conventional weapons is of great concern. There are approximately 900 million small arms in global circulation. However, only one-third is in the hands of legally sanctioned police and military forces. Nearly one million firearms produced are lost or stolen. More than 300,000 people are killed with small arms every year.

Most of the present-day conflicts are fought with small arms. They are the weapons of choice in civil wars and for terrorism, organized crime and gang warfare. They are cheap light and easy to handle, transport and conceal.

Efforts by the UN to reach agreement on an Arms Trade Treaty failed at the last moment. Delegates from more than 170 countries spent a month in July 2012 trying to secure consensus on regulating the \$60 billion a year trade in conventional weapons. Hopes were dashed when both the US and Russians claimed that there was not enough time to clarify and resolve a small number of issues.

The American Administration was under tremendous pressure by a misinformation campaign launched by the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) .A letter to president Obama by 51 senators claimed, falsely, that the Arms Trade Treaty could impinge on the constitutional right of Americans to keep arms. During an election year Obama and his advisors did not want to take the risk of contesting this assertion .

The NRA claim is incorrect. The treaty does not affect ownership or transfer of weapons **within borders**. The NRA depicts the treaty as a UN attack on the second amendment. The main aim of the treaty is to bring some order in the international trade of conventional arms making

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it more difficult for arms to reach the illicit market and fall into the wrong hands.

Paul Krugman (New York Times columnist,) has written that bad ideas flourish because such ideas are in the interest of powerful groups.

Despite the NRA efforts, all hope is not lost, There is a chance that the draft treaty will be brought to the annual General Assembly meeting in October where it requires only a two-third majority for it to pass. The treaty would go into effect once it has been ratified by 65 countries.

Strong public support is required to push forward an arms treaty. An example of the strength of public support is the successful campaign to ban land mines which sparked a convention in 1997.

The goal of reducing the illicit trade in small arms is vital for saving many lives. It is tragic that conventional weapons receive less attention than weapons of mass destruction; yet they are the most common type of armament globally and historically used in conflict with devastating results.

Amnesty International and Oxfam have campaigns for an effective arms trade treaty. Recently they drove an old tank around London to dramatize their demand. We should all support the efforts of such groups.

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