

FROM THE UNITED NATIONS CULTURE OF PEACE AND THE SMALL ARMS TRADE

In 1953 Dwight Eisenhower noted that "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."

Today, throughout the world, the arms industry siphons off money that is essential for peace. The world is currently awash in all types of weapons. Despite the reported downward trend in conflict, it is estimated that in 2008 world governments spent a staggering \$1500 billion to arm themselves. Of the estimated 890 million small arms in circulation, many have been illegally obtained. In fact, more is known about the number of nuclear warheads, stocks of chemical weapons and transfer of major conventional weapons than about small arms.

Most present-day conflicts are fought within states with small arms. Because they are cheap, easy to use and widely available they become weapons of choice in civil wars, terrorism and organized crime. Furthermore, because of the lack of regulation it is easy for small arms to slip from the legal market to the illicit market. Only about a third are in the hands of legally constituted security forces. Despite the fact that more than 300,000 people are killed each year with small arms, the world has never agreed to a set of rules on the transnational small arms trade. In fact, the sad irony is that cumbersome rules exist on the selling of bananas but there are no solid international binding rules on the \$7 billion a year business of selling small arms. Small arms are big business and though the UN has tried to regulate the traffic for years, its regulation is fiercely opposed by the arms industry.

In 2001 the U.N. introduced a program for action to combat the illicit trade. In 2005 the UN called for small arms to be marked, in order to allow for tracing and tracking in hopes of stemming illegal trafficking. This approach, however, has yielded almost no success.

The globalization of information fosters viewing the world as a more violent place than it actually is. In fact, despite the appearance of great violence, the number of conflicts and the number of casualties have been significantly reduced since the end of the Cold War. The most severe conflicts and the number of genocides has declined dramatically. However, vigilance is an important requirement for prevention and an arms trade treaty must be developed and its adherence must be enforced.

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In order for an arms trade treaty to be effective, history has shown that there must be a strong show of public support. For example, an outcry in the early 1960's against testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere resulted in a treaty in 1963. Another example was the international campaign to ban land mines which sparked a convention in 1997 which produced a land mine treaty that reduced casualties from land mines by two-thirds and reduced the trade in land mines to almost zero, despite the fact that the US, China, India and Russia have not signed it.

In 1998, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the period from 2001-2010 the International Decade for the Culture of Peace. We are now into 2012. The UN has a vision of change in consciousness, transformation in individual behavior and national and institutional practices. These international qualities tap a deep and pervasive source within humanity that has resulted in the worldwide union and collaboration of many peace organizations.

Today there are numerous peace academies, peace research institutions, and university programs for developing conflict prevention, resolution and negotiation strategies. The International Peace Institute, The National Peace Academy and the Peace Studies Program at Cornell. The Peace Education Project has developed and introduced material for school children.

In July 2012, after much preparation, a major conference will be held to develop a strong and effective arms trade treaty (ATT) to save lives and to cope with the uncontrolled illegal trade in conventional weapons. The dream of a peaceful world is ancient and perennial. Support for ATT should clearly be an important test project for the culture of peace movement. Maybe the world is ready now.

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