

ATT Questions and Answers April 2012



Is Amnesty International calling for an end to the arms trade? Is the Arms Trade Treaty a weapons ban treaty?

No. Amnesty International recognizes that governments can lawfully sell, acquire and possess arms for their security, law enforcement and self defence, consistent with international law and best practice standards.

What do we want governments to do?

Amnesty International is asking all governments to stand up for a treaty with the highest possible standards including strong human rights protection rules at the UN negotiations in July 2012. This means a Treaty that effectively prevents arms from fuelling serious human rights abuses and war crimes.

What do the “highest possible standards” include?

Amnesty International wants to see these components in an ATT:

- States are required not to transfer arms internationally where there is a substantial risk that they will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law
- a comprehensive definition of the scope of conventional arms
- all types of international trade, transfers and transactions are included
- robust regulation of licensing systems including prior risk assessment and ensuring end users
- all States keep records of the international arms transfers they have authorized
- transparency measures including public reporting

How comprehensive a list of “arms” are you talking about?

The Arms Trade Treaty is intended to cover conventional arms. Separate treaties exist to cover materials like nuclear or biological weapons. Amnesty International would like to see “conventional arms” defined in the Treaty as all weapons, munitions, armaments and related material, including parts, components and technologies, used for military and internal security operations, including:

a. Tanks

- b. Military vehicles
- c. Artillery systems
- d. Military aircraft (manned or unmanned)
- e. Military helicopters (manned or unmanned)
- f. Naval vessels (surface and submarine vessels armed or equipped for military use)
- g. Missiles, missile systems and projectiles (guided or unguided)
- h. Small arms
- i. Light weapons
- j. Munitions and ammunition for use with weapons defined in subparagraphs (a) – (i).
- k. Parts or Components specially and exclusively designed for any of the categories in subparagraphs (a)-(j).
- l. Technology and Equipment specially and exclusively designed and used to develop, manufacture, or maintain any of the categories in subparagraphs (a) - (k).



Why do we need a global Arms Trade Treaty?

Every day, millions of people suffer from the direct and indirect consequences of the irresponsible and poorly regulated arms trade. Here are some sobering statistics:

1,500 people are killed every day as a result of conflict and armed violence

26 million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict

12 billion bullets are produced every year

74 % of the world's weapons are produced by six countries: USA, UK, France, Russia, Germany and China

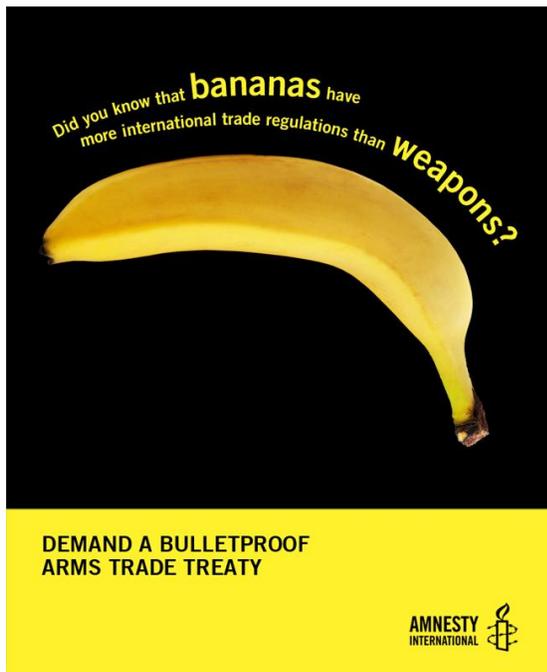
The majority of casualties from armed conflict are civilians.

Beyond killing, millions of people have to live under the constant threat of weapons which are also used to perpetrate thousands of human rights violations each year.

Can you give some specific examples of conflicts or abuses fueled by an irresponsible arms trade?

Existing arms export controls have failed to prevent transfers of arms to Sudan from being used in Darfur despite a UN arms embargo on the region. A renewed conflict along the border between Sudan and newly independent South Sudan now puts even more civilians at risk. Yet Belarus, China, and the Russian Federation – among others – continue to supply attack aircraft, helicopter gunships, air-to-ground rockets, weapons, munitions and related equipment to Sudan despite decades of systematic human rights abuses and war crimes.

Long before the recent uprisings, most governments chose to ignore the internal repression in the Middle East and North Africa. They supplied weapons, munitions and security equipment to governments with decades-long records of systematic human rights violations. Some arms supplying states now want to resume “business as usual”, despite ongoing protests, impunity and the lack of genuine reform.



Aren't there already international rules about how weapons are traded?

The world's governments have never agreed to comprehensive, legally binding international rules governing the trade of weapons. As incredible as it may seem, there are international regulations controlling the trade in dinosaur bones, bananas, and bottled water, but not guns, bullets and tanks.

What we have right now for regulating the arms trade is a patchwork of rules including the UN Charter, arms embargoes (UN and regional bodies), the Firearms Protocol (a treaty which regulates one aspect of the global arms trade), and some other multilateral, sub-regional and regional binding agreements. But each addresses only a piece of the problem, and the criteria and accountability measures vary considerably. Too many gaps remain.

If existing controls aren't working, how do we know this will?

Most governments have been inconsistent in implementing existing regional or multilateral controls on the arms trade, or have failed to incorporate them into national law.

Several arms-exporting countries have not signed up to these agreements at all. The result of this is that weapons frequently fall into the wrong hands, where they are used to fuel conflict, poverty and human rights abuses.

However, the arms trade is global and to control it requires a global solution. An Arms Trade Treaty would be international, ensuring all countries are working to the same standards. It would also be legally binding, and in line with international law.

In the UN General Assembly in 2010, the majority of governments agreed that the objective of the Arms Trade Treaty is to create the highest possible common standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms.

Because an Arms Trade Treaty would be international, it would ensure all countries are legally bound to the same standards.

How would an international Arms Trade Treaty work?

An effective Arms Trade Treaty should be one that protects lives, livelihoods and human rights. However, the Treaty should allow for countries to lawfully sell, acquire and possess arms for their security, law enforcement and self defence, consistent with international law and best practice standards.

But to ensure real security, the Treaty should also require countries not to transfer arms internationally where there is a substantial risk that these weapons will be used in serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law, which states are already obliged to uphold.

An effective Arms Trade Treaty should also prevent international arms transfers where there is a substantial risk that they will facilitate patterns of armed violence including terrorist attacks, gender-based violence, violent crime and organized crime; or that they will seriously impair poverty reduction or socio-economic development.

Why aren't you calling for an end to the arms trade, 'full stop'?

We recognize that governments can lawfully sell, acquire and possess arms for their security, law enforcement and self defence, consistent with international law and best practice standards.

We're calling for strong global regulations on the transfer of weapons between countries to stem human rights abuses that can happen when the world's weapons fall into the wrong hands.



Has work started on an Arms Trade Treaty?

The idea of an arms trade treaty first came from Nobel Peace Laureates, supported by civil society organizations worldwide.

Amnesty International was at the forefront of the 'Million Faces' campaign which resulted in the UN member states agreeing in 2006 to introduce a global Arms Trade Treaty.

In December 2006, 153 governments finally voted at the United Nations to start work on developing a global Arms Trade Treaty. Momentum for the treaty has been building ever since.

In 2009 the UN General Assembly launched a time frame for the negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty. This included one preparatory meeting in 2010 two in 2011, and one in February 2012, before the final negotiating conference scheduled for July 2012.

What are some of the key challenges to achieving a strong Arms Trade Treaty with human rights protection at its core?

There are significant challenges on the road leading up to July 2012. There is a danger that seeking consensus could drive the treaty to the lowest common denominator, including the risk that only a narrow range of weapons or transfer activities will be included. This would mean that the treaty would not control all the equipment and transactions necessary to reduce armed violence.

Some powerful governments remain skeptical or are opposed to an ATT and could block the UN negotiating process.

Other concerns are that implementation measures will be weak and that governments will take too long to ratify the treaty, delaying its entry into force.

Is this campaign disrespectful to our armed troops, including those that have given their lives?

No, absolutely not. Efforts to secure stronger controls on the arms trade are widely supported by members of the armed services, including former soldiers with direct battle experience.

If a strong, robust ATT is agreed at the July 2012 negotiations then our armed forces will be safer. Currently many of our armed forces and those of other countries are placed in direct peril due to inadequate regulation of the global arms trade.

Photos:

1. Gun sculpture on the grounds of the United Nations in New York.
2. A child collects bullets from the ground in Rounyn, North Darfur, 27 March 2011 © UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran
3. Control Arms campaign action in the UK 2006

For more information on the Campaign for an Arms Trade Treaty, check out amnesty.ca/armstreaty or contact Hilary Homes at the national office: hhomes@amnesty.ca.

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