

**PROJECT  
PLOUGHSHARES**  
**40**  
**years**

The Honourable Stéphane Dion  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0G2

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland  
Minister of International Trade  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario  
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January 15, 2015

Dear Ministers,

We are writing with respect to Amnesty International and Project Ploughshares' ongoing concerns about the multi-billion dollar sale to Saudi Arabia of light armoured vehicles manufactured in Canada. In particular we are reiterating our recommendation that a current, thorough human rights assessment of this deal be conducted and that the results of that assessment be released publicly.

It is beyond dispute that there are longstanding and extensive human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Those violations arise across the full range of rights enshrined in international law, including torture and ill-treatment, women's equality, unjust and secretive executions, religious freedom, freedom of expression, the rights of human rights defenders, press freedom, fair trials and arbitrary detention.

Additionally there are very serious concerns that Saudi forces have been responsible for human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law in other countries, notably Bahrain and Yemen. Amnesty International's research over the past year has in fact documented extensive war crimes committed by Saudi forces in Yemen and that some of the weapons used by Saudi forces in Yemen to commit these war crimes have originated in other countries, notably the United States and the United Kingdom.

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Amnesty International has therefore called on governments to immediately suspend arms transfers and military support to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners which could be used to commit or facilitate further serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Yemen.

It is our assessment that the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia has continued to deteriorate, particularly over the past year. In a recent briefing, released on January 8, 2016, Amnesty International noted that over the past year the human rights record in Saudi Arabia has gone “from bad to worse”. That has included a “sweeping crackdown on human rights activists” and a “devastating air bombardment campaign in Yemen that saw commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes.”

Canadians have been increasingly aware of and concerned about the country’s dismal human rights record through the deeply troubling case of Raif Badawi, the imprisoned blogger sentenced to a 10 year prison term and 1,000 lashes. His wife and young children live in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Raif Badawi’s lawyer is also imprisoned and his sister was briefly arrested and detained earlier this week. Further reports of human rights violations emerge regularly from Saudi Arabia.

Ministers, in this context, there are very good reasons to be concerned that light armoured vehicles provided to Saudi security forces could very likely be used in circumstances involving human rights violations, be that as part of interventions in neighbouring countries or in responding to and suppressing demonstrations or unrest within Saudi Arabia. That is why it is of essential importance that a thorough human rights assessment be conducted on the basis of current information that takes account of the deteriorating state of human rights in the country and rising security tensions in the region.

Our organizations repeatedly called on the previous government to carry out and release a human rights assessment. That recommendation was repeated in Amnesty International’s report, *Defending Rights for All: A Human Rights Agenda for Canada*, published last month. It has been difficult to obtain clear information as to what assessment has been conducted to date and when that might have occurred.

Several commentators have expressed concern about our recommendation, arguing that commercially confidential information cannot be made public. That should not be an insurmountable challenge. The critical information here is not about costing, manufacturing methods and delivery schedules. It is instead such questions as the nature of the vehicles, who they will be delivered to, understandings of how they are to be used and the risk of them being used in violation of international law.

**Amnesty International and Project Ploughshares urge, therefore, that the Canadian government:**

- **conduct a current, thorough human rights assessment of the sale to Saudi Arabia of light armoured vehicles manufactured in Canada;**
- **publish the criteria used in carrying out the human rights assessment; and**
- **publicly release the results of the human rights assessment.**

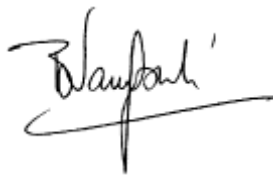
We very much welcome the government's commitment to accede to the Arms Trade Treaty and to adopt a different approach to future arms deals that give rise to human rights concerns. However, we are strongly of the view that this current deal also requires thorough scrutiny from a human rights perspective. Doing so will be a tremendous first step in setting Canada up for strong compliance with the terms of the Arms Trade Treaty and putting in place an arms trade framework that scrupulously upholds human rights.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you or your officials to discuss this further. Arrangements can be made through Alex Neve's Executive Assistants Aden Seaton/Sarah French at 613 744 7667, extension 263 or by email at [ea@amnesty.ca](mailto:ea@amnesty.ca).

Sincerely,



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