Humanitarian, Arms Control Groups Urge President Obama to Close Loopholes; Support Effective Arms Trade Treaty

(Washington and New York) Major U.S. humanitarian and arms control organizations, including Amnesty International USA, Oxfam America, Arms Control Association, and United to Prevent Genocide, are pressing President Barack Obama to work with other countries close the remaining loopholes in text of the Arms Trade Treaty now under negotiation.

In a letter sent earlier today to the White House, the leaders wrote: "While the July 24 treaty text that has emerged from this month's negotiation falls short in several areas, we believe that with some specific fixes, it still represents an important opportunity to reduce the impact of the illicit global arms trade and save lives, and it should be supported by the United States."

A robust and effective Arms Trade Treaty would establish international standards would ban all arms transfers that could facilitate genocide, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes. It will also close the gaps in the current international system of laws by requiring countries to adopt strong laws that would govern the flow of weapons in and out of their borders.

"The end is in sight for a global arms trade treaty but its success depends on the United States," said Scott Stedjan, senior policy advisor with Oxfam America. "Washington needs to back a strong text to prevent the negotiations from collapsing."

"We urge the United States and other arms exporters to work with others, especially those most affected by violence fueled by illicit arms dealing, to provide the leadership and flexibility to reach an agreement by Friday's deadline," said Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Control
Arms Association.

"As Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton outlined in remarks this week at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial on preventing the mass slaughter of civilians, there must be a new emphasis on prevention," stated the letter. "As she said, we can 'directly pressure those who organize atrocities and cut off the resources they need to continue their violence.'"

The letter encourages President Obama and the U.S. negotiating team to address the following issues:

- ensure that the treaty requires that states establish national import and export regulations that guard against irresponsible export of ammunition;
- includes a prohibition on arms transfers to states that they know may be used to commit or facilitate acts of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. This would be consistent with the vision outlined in Secretary Clinton's remarks this week;
- ensure that states are obligated not to transfer weapons if they determine there is a substantial risk that the transfer will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law;
- be adjusted to ensure that it addresses all types of arms transfers, not just "exports," and
- be adjusted so that it does not allow states to exempt arms sales under previous contracts or defense cooperation agreements that pose a serious risk of facilitating violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, or international arms embargoes or otherwise violate the object and purpose of the treaty.

The call to action comes one day before negotiations conclude on July 27.

July 26, 2012
Dear Mr. President,

With one day left to conclude the first ever global Arms Trade Treaty, we write to urge you and your administration to close the remaining loopholes in the treaty text now under negotiation and to urge other key states to support the treaty, which can help reduce the substantial harm inflicted by the illicit arms trade.

As Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton outlined in remarks this week at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial on preventing the mass slaughter of civilians, there must be a new emphasis on prevention. As she said, we can "directly pressure those who organize atrocities and cut off the resources they need to continue their violence."

While the July 24 treaty text that has emerged from this month's negotiation falls short in several areas, we believe that with some specific fixes, it still represents an important opportunity to reduce the impact of the illicit global arms trade and save lives, and it should be supported by the United States.
In the final hours of these ATT negotiations, we respectfully encourage you and your negotiating team to address these very important issues in the treaty text:

- retains a clear prohibition on arms transfers for the purpose of facilitating -- or with the knowledge that those items will be used in -- the commission of acts of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. This would be consistent with the policy outlined by Secretary Clinton this week;
- ensures that states are obligated not to authorize arms transfers if they determine there is a substantial risk that the items will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law;
- requires that states establish national import and export regulations that guard against circumvention of the treaty through irresponsible export of ammunition;
- be adjusted to ensure that it addresses all types of arms transfers, not just “exports,” and
- be adjusted so that it does not allow states to exempt arms sales under previous contracts or defense cooperation agreements that may violate the object and purpose of the treaty.

With these points in mind, we encourage you to use your influence to bring other significant countries on board in order to open the way for the treaty's approval and opening for signature.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Eric Sapp,

Executive Director,

American Values Network

Suzanne Nossel,
Letter Calls on Obama to Close Loopholes and Support Arms Trade Treaty

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