



"We all want an Arms Trade Treaty"

Development



## A Development Criterion for the Arms Trade Treaty

### The Effects of Armed Violence on Development

For years, humanitarian and development organizations have worked alongside communities severely impacted by armed violence. **For a great many of the world's poor people, war and criminal armed violence are directly impeding their chances of development.** Even cautious figures suggest that aside from the nearly 50,000 people that are killed every year by direct fighting, many times more are killed indirectly through disease and malnutrition associated with the conflict, even after the violence has ended.

For those who live through conflict, armed violence often closes their schools, paralyzes their communities, burdens their healthcare systems, discourages investment and economic activity, and makes their lives and livelihoods less secure. **At least 22 of the 34 countries least likely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are in the midst of – or emerging from – conflict.**

**Much of the violence affecting communities is fueled to a large extent by the irresponsible and poorly regulated trade in conventional weapons.** Arms transfers alone do not cause armed conflict. Transfers of military and security equipment to states that use weapons responsibly can assist a state to provide the security and stability necessary for development. However, irresponsible and illicit transfers can have the opposite effect. Extensive research shows how the availability of and access to conventional arms and ammunition can aggravate, intensify, and prolong armed violence.

### The Link between the Global Arms Trade and Poverty

The poorly regulated arms trade also contributes to poverty outside of situations of armed conflict. Where arms transfers take place without accountability and transparency, countries can risk losing millions through corruption or wasted expenditures. For some developing countries this means significant losses for spending on healthcare and education. A stark example is Burundi. Burundi experienced a long civil war in 1993 which left 300,000 people killed and at least 1 million displaced. Research in 2007 conducted by Oxfam, Saferworld, and IANSA put the total economic cost of the conflict at \$5.7 billion. This devastating toll on lives and livelihoods in Burundi severely affected the country's health statistics, which is already among the worst in the world. Even after the 2006 ceasefire, 75 percent of the costs of treating violent injuries have been spent on gunshot wounds. **On average, each firearm injury costs Burundi's health system \$163, in a country where per capita health spending is \$5 a year. US development aid to Burundi for fiscal year 2006 was \$6,093,000.**

*"I call on the governments of the world to be bold in our work towards the ATT. The treaty provides an opportunity to agree [to] tough controls on the arms trade that would significantly help reduce armed violence in Africa and across the world, an opportunity that is truly priceless."*

*Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf  
President of Liberia, August 2007*

In 2007 alone, the US donated \$4.76 billion in aid to Africa for development programs supporting economic growth and humanitarian assistance. While the US is investing to better the lives and livelihoods of individuals, weapons flood into fragile states through porous borders and weak controls. This significant economic investment is directly undermined and overshadowed by the devastating economic and human cost fueled by the irresponsible and illicit arms trade. It is true that no single measure can prevent the global proliferation and misuse of conventional weapons and their negative

effects on development. However, one priority must be countries' agreement on comprehensive, legally binding controls for the international weapons trade in order to prevent irresponsible transfers. The adoption of a robust global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) would help safeguard development efforts and investments from irresponsible arms transfers and in doing so, address the needs and aspirations of poor people and those struggling to emerge from armed conflict and instability.

### The Need for an Arms Trade Treaty

In October 2009, the US government announced it will support the ATT and participate in treaty negotiations at the United Nations, with Preparatory Committee meetings commencing in July 2010. **As the world's current largest donor of international development assistance – roughly \$28.7 billion for 2009 – as well as the largest arms exporter globally, it is in the economic and national security interests of the US to support an ATT.** The link here is clear: a well-regulated and transparent international arms trade means less irresponsible end users obtaining weapons, less armed violence, more peaceful communities, and in turn, a far better investment of US dollars spent on development aid in these communities.

To this end, it is essential that an ATT prohibit arms transfers **if the relevant government licensing authorities determine there is a substantial risk that a transfer will seriously impair poverty reduction or socio-economic development.** Section 2773 of the U.S. Arms Export Control Act (AECA) already calls for the President to exercise restraint in selling or financing the sale of defense articles and services for Sub-Saharan Africa, given that “the problems of Sub-Saharan Africa are primarily those of economic development and that United States policy should assist in limiting the development of costly military conflict in that region.” But Section 2773 is not enough – global standards must be adopted to eliminate the loopholes that endanger civilian lives and stifle development in all parts of the world. We therefore urge the US to actively support the following essential elements for a development criterion during ATT negotiations:

**Arms should not be transferred where there is a substantial risk of:**

**Increasing or maintaining high levels of armed violence, nationally or regionally;**

**Undermining peace-building or post-conflict reconstruction programs;**

**Involving the excessive and unaccountable allocation of human and economic resources to armaments; or**

**Involving a pattern of corruption.**

The ATT is intended to set rules on the international legal trade of arms, not the illicit trade. However, many of the arms currently undermining development arrive at their destinations not through government-authorized transfers but through the illegal arms market. Porous and unregulated borders in many countries throughout the world make the control of illegal arms flows very difficult. Addressing illegal arms smuggling undoubtedly requires investment such as building customs, border control, and law enforcement capabilities. **An ATT would complement these efforts by creating a transparent and responsible legal trade in arms that makes the diversion of weapons from the legal to the illicit trade more difficult.**

If the United States and other governments want to get the most out of their development investments, action must be taken to reduce the likelihood and severity of armed violence. Without addressing the supply of arms and ammunition, such efforts will be futile. Unless the US takes action toward a robust ATT that ensures that states do not transfer weapons if they will seriously undermine poverty reduction efforts, the cost to development – measured not just in dollars wasted but in lives shattered and opportunities squandered – will remain immense. ■

### Oxfam America

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