

The Inter-American Convention On Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions At a Glance

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June 2003

On November 21, 2002, the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions entered into force. Negotiated by the 34-member Organization of American States (OAS)¹ and opened for signature in June 1999, the convention is an unprecedented, regional transparency regime that requires its states-parties to annually report on their weapons exports and imports, as well as make timely notifications of their weapons acquisitions, whether imported or produced domestically. Twenty countries, including the United States, have signed the convention and eight have ratified it. (States-parties are in bold and signatories are in italics in footnote 1.)

Terms of the Convention

Annual Reports: No later than June 15 each year, states-parties will submit to the OAS General Secretariat a report on their exports and imports of battle tanks, armored combat vehicles (ACVs), large-caliber artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles and missile systems. These seven categories mirror those of the voluntary U.N. Register of Conventional Arms, which calls on all countries to annually submit reports on their import and export of these same weapons to the United Nations. In their annual OAS reports, states-parties must identify the type and quantity of weapons transferred and name the exporting or importing country. Additional information, such as the designation or model of the weapon, may be volunteered.

Notification of Acquisitions: No later than 90 days after incorporation of a weapon system into a state-party's armed forces inventory, a notification must be submitted to the OAS General Secretariat. This notification requirement applies to both imported and domestically manufactured weapons in the same seven categories covered by the annual report. The United States, a leading proponent of the convention, had sought inclusion of a provision for advance notification, but Latin American countries objected. States-parties are free to provide advance notification if they choose to do so.

The OAS General Secretariat will transmit the annual reports and notifications received to all states-parties, though the information will not be made publicly available. States-parties are free to consult with each other on the shared information.

Background

The convention grew out of a June 1997 OAS General Assembly resolution calling on members to consider a legal framework for advance notification of arms acquisitions. Shortly thereafter in August 1997, the Clinton administration dropped a two-decade-old policy of "presumption against" the export of advanced weapons to Latin America. This policy change cleared the way for U.S. arms manufacturers to compete for weapons sales to the region. Former President Jimmy Carter and several Latin American heads of state, both past and those in office at the time, criticized the new Clinton arms transfer policy as one that would divert scarce resources from more important government investments, such as education, and lead to increased regional tensions. Since the U.S. policy change, the United States completed a deal to sell 10 F-16 fighter jets to Chile and offered combat aircraft to Brazil. Citing other economic priorities, Brazil postponed in January 2003 a decision on buying fighter jets.

In comparison with other regions, Latin America is a relatively small arms market. The region's arms imports have generally accounted for roughly two to five percent of the world arms market over the past decade. In recent years, there has been a decline, particularly among Central American countries, in arms imports due to an economic slump and reduced conflict in the region.

NOTE

1. The 34 members of the OAS are Antigua and Barbuda, *Argentina*, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, *Bolivia*, *Brazil*, **Canada**, *Chile*, *Colombia*, *Costa Rica*, *Dominica*, Dominican Republic, **Ecuador**, **El Salvador**, Grenada, **Guatemala**, Guyana, *Haiti*, *Honduras*, Jamaica, *Mexico*, **Nicaragua**, Panama, **Paraguay**, **Peru**, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Suriname, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, *United States*, **Uruguay**, and *Venezuela*. Cuba was excluded from OAS participation in 1962.

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