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Arms business

The Modern Successor to the Slave Trade

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No longer should the peace business be undermined by the arms business

09/13/06 "The Independent" â€” For many years, I've been involved in the peace business, doing what I can to help people overcome their differences. In doing so, I've also learnt a lot about the business of war: the arms trade. In my opinion it is the modern slave trade. It is an industry out of control: every day more than 1,000 people are killed by conventional weapons. The vast majority of those people are innocent men, women and children.

There have been international treaties to control the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons for decades. Yet, despite the mounting death toll, there is still no treaty governing sales of all conventional weapons from handguns to attack helicopters. As a result, weapons fall into the wrong hands all too easily, fuelling human rights abuses, prolonging wars and digging countries deeper into poverty.

This is allowed to continue because of the complicity of governments, especially rich countries' governments, which turn a blind eye to the appalling human suffering associated with the proliferation of weapons.

Every year, small arms alone kill more people than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki put together. Many more people are injured, terrorised or driven from their homes by armed violence. Even as you read this, one of these human tragedies is unfolding somewhere on the planet.

Take the Democratic Republic of Congo, where armed violence recently flared up again, and millions have died during almost a decade of conflict. Despite a UN arms embargo against armed groups in the country, weapons have continued to flood in from all over the world.

Arms found during weapons collections include those made in Germany, France, Israel, USA and Russia. The only common denominator is that nearly all these weapons were manufactured outside Africa. Five rich countries manufacture the vast majority of the world's weapons. In 2005, Russia, the United States, France, Germany and the UK accounted for an estimated 82 per cent of the global arms market. And it's big business: the amount rich countries spend on fighting HIV/Aids every year represents just 18 days' global spending on arms.

But while the profits flow back to the developed world, the effects of the arms trade are predominantly felt in developing countries. More than two-thirds of the value of all arms are sold to Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

In addition to the deaths, injuries and rapes perpetrated with these weapons, the cost of conflict goes deeper still, destroying health and education systems.

For example, in northern Uganda, which has been devastated by 20 years of armed conflict, it has been estimated that 250,000 children do not attend school. The war in northern Uganda, which may be finally coming to an end, has been fuelled by supplies of foreign-made weapons. And, as with so many wars, the heaviest toll has been on the region's children. Children under five are always the most vulnerable to disease, and in a war zone adequate medical care is often not available.

The world could eradicate poverty in a few generations were only a fraction of the expenditure on the war business to be spent on peace. An average of \$22bn is spent on arms by countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa every year, according to estimates for the US Congress. This sum would have enabled those countries to put every child in school and to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by 2015, fulfilling two of the Millennium Development

Goals.

This year, the world has the chance to finally say no to the continuing scandal of the unregulated weapons trade. In October, governments will vote on a resolution at the UN General Assembly to start working towards an Arms Trade Treaty. That Treaty would be based on a simple principle: no weapons for violations of international law. In other words, a ban on selling weapons if there is a clear risk they will be used to abuse human rights or fuel conflict. The UN resolution has been put forward by the governments of Australia, Argentina, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya, and the UK. These governments believe the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty is one whose time has come.

I agree. We must end impunity for governments who authorise the supply of weapons when they know there's a great danger those weapons will be used for gross human rights abuses. Great strides are being made towards ending impunity for war criminals. It cannot be acceptable that their arms suppliers continue to escape punishment. No longer should the peace business be undermined by the arms business. I call on all governments to put the control of the international arms trade at the top of their agenda.

Desmond Tutu

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ACDN remarks:

The current situation, as described by Desmond Tutu, is tragic and scandalous. But the solution he is supporting is not sufficient.

"All conventional weapons from handguns to attack helicopters" are devised to shoot, to injure and to kill people, no matter in whose hands they are nor by whom they are used. These are crime tools. So, they must be prohibited. Production and trade of conventional arms must cease.

A treaty supposed to be "controlling" the arms trade not only would not succeed in preventing clandestine exports (which already exist with the benediction of weapon producing states), but even would legitimize such a criminal trade.

If we want to reach the "general disarmament" urged by Article VI of the NPT, we have to get first the prohibition of ALL arms exports, which will ultimately stop their production.

Moreover, this interdiction will make controlling the clandestine arms trade much more easy since any export will be prohibited. It will not be possible to continue issueing false export certificates, and one will be able to seize and destroy any weapon appearing at any border.

In order to get the agreement of the concerned states, one could admit that, first, the existing purchase and sales contracts be honoured (but providing at the same time each party with a legal right of cancelling).

The coproduction of weapons systems by allied states should be regulated by specific provisions.

But the basic principle and the final aim of such a Treaty should be stopping the trade of conventional (and "emerging") weapons, stopping finally their production. Similarly, regarding the nuclear, biological and chemical (or

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new) Weapons of Mass Destruction, the only valid objective is that they be abolished.

Consequently, the draft treaty on arms trade which should be submitted now to the 2006 UN General Assembly and then to its 1st Committee in October 2006 is A BAD TREATY. It does not merit our support. While organising the arms trade "control", it hopes to limit and "moralize" that trade. Actually, it will limit nothing, it will "moralize" immorality and legitimize AD VITAM AETERNAM a trade which must be purely prohibited.

If, as Desmond Tutu rightly says, the "business of war" is "the modern slave trade", there is no reason to place it "under control": you must condemn it and make it disappear.

ANOTHER Treaty draft, founded on these OTHER principles should be submitted to the UN General Assembly. If it is too late for writing and finalizing it, it would be preferable to put off any discussion and resolution on the subject until next year. If it is no more possible to put them off, at least the UN General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security, which meets every October for 4-5 weeks, after the September General Assembly General Debate, should discuss and deeply change the principles, objectives and proposed measures of the draft.