

Information Clearing House

NEWS YOU WON'T FIND ON CNN

 E-MAIL TO A FRIEND

US casts sole 'no' vote against proposed treaty restricting arms trade

By Kaleem Omar

12/09/06 "The News" -- -- The United States, which is the world's biggest exporter of arms and accounts for more than 50 per cent of all arms exports, on Wednesday became the only country in the United Nations to vote against letting work begin on a new treaty to bolster arms embargoes and prevent human rights abuses by setting uniform worldwide standards for arms deals. The vote in the 192-nation UN General Assembly was 153-1, with the United States casting the sole "no" vote. Twenty-four other nations abstained, including major arms sellers Russia and China and emerging exporters India and Pakistan.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose term of office ends on December 31, welcomed the launch of a process that could lead to a treaty regulating international trade in conventional weapons. Unregulated trade in such arms "currently contributes to conflict, crime and terrorism, and undermines international efforts for peace and development," Annan spokeswoman Marie Okabe said.

The Reuters news agency reported that the measure would give incoming US Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (South Korea's former foreign minister), who succeeds Annan on January 1, a year to explore and report back to the General Assembly on the feasibility and scope of a binding international treaty establishing uniform standards for arms deals.

Work on the International Arms Treaty will begin immediately following Wednesday's vote in the UN General Assembly. The vote came just three years after the launch of the "Control Arms" campaign, which has seen over a million people in 170 countries calling for a treaty.

Three-quarters of the UN member nations voted in favour of the proposal, which was also supported by an overwhelming number of countries in the UN General Assembly's First Committee in October.

There was also strong support from the governments of Europe as well as the Pacific region and Latin America.

“Significant support for an Arms Trade Treaty has come from some of the world’s most gun-affected regions; this indicates not only widespread recognition of the problem but also widespread political will,” said Rebecca Peters, Director of The International Action Network on Small Arms (TANSA).

The Bush administration, remained the only government to vote against the proposal, despite a recent appeal by 14 US senators to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the administration to reconsider its position.

Wednesday’s vote in the UN General Assembly has been described as “historic” by TANSA. But it can only become historic in practical terms if the United States were to agree to sign the treaty, ratify it and agree to abide by its provisions. If the US does not do so, the world’s biggest arms exporter would remain outside the purview of the treaty - reducing it, in effect, to just another piece of paper.

In December, 2001, the Bush administration withdrew from the US-Russia Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, with President George W. Bush calling the treaty a “relic” of the Cold War era which had “outlived its usefulness.” Bush’s remarks prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to warn of a new arms race.

In May 2002, during a visit to Moscow by Bush, he and Putin signed a new arms control treaty. But the new agreement reached on May 13, 2002, is a treaty in name only because it allows for the continued escalation of American militarism with the acquiescence of the Russian government.

The main component of the treaty is a pledge by both sides to cut nuclear warheads to about a third of their 2002 levels over the course of the next decade. However, there is no timetable for the deactivation of the weapons. This means that the United States (as well as Russia) is free even to increase its stockpile during the intervening period, so long as the number does not exceed the limit in 2012.

And the loopholes don’t end there. The treaty does not require the actual destruction of the deactivated warheads. Russia has indicated its opposition to assertions by the United States government that the US could reduce its stockpile by simply placing the weapons in storage, available for quick and easy reactivation - essentially an accounting trick. The agreement does not prohibit this method, and US officials have indicated that the plan to use it for at least a portion of the current stockpile.

Moreover, the agreement provides that either country will be allowed to withdraw from it with only 90 days’ notice. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, from which

the US announced plans to withdraw in December 2001, and most other arms-control agreements have twice as long a waiting period. And, in contrast to such agreements as START I, no restrictions are placed on the type of weapons that can be deployed.

Like Russia, the United States has enough nuclear warheads in its arsenal (more than 11,000) to wipe out humanity several times over. To make matters even worse, the Bush administration is now developing a new breed of US "mini" nukes, known as bunker-busters, for use on the battlefield.

The US's Los Alamos laboratory (which produced the atom bombs that wiped out the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, killing more than 200,000 innocent Japanese civilians in the process) has been given the go-ahead by the Bush administration to produce mini-nukes. The US is currently spending more than \$ 5 billion a year on the production and upgrading of nuclear weapons.

What sort of insane philosophy lies behind this? Does the US now want to have the capability to wipe out humanity five times over, instead of its current capability to wipe out humanity three times over? The mind boggles.

Given the US's dismal track record on arms-control issues, there does not appear to be much hope that the proposed new International Arms Trade Treaty will actually work.

In this context, it is instructive to recall what Mary Robinson (former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, former President of Ireland, honorary President of Oxfam International and head of the Ethical Globalisation Initiative) said in a statement issued on December 10, 2003.

Robinson said, "On this 55th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, threats of new terrorist attacks and the dangers of weapons of mass destruction dominate the headlines. But the real weapons of mass destruction go largely unnoticed by those of us who live far from conflict and war. Those weapons are the 639 million small arms in circulation, and at least 16 billion units of military ammunition produced every year - enough to shoot every man, woman and child on the planet twice."

During her five years as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Robinson spent a huge proportion of her time meeting people who had been terrorised by armed violence.

She said: "I went to Colombia and met some of those caught in the crossfire. I witnessed the same in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Time and again a tide of weapons fed the slaughter and kept

the conflict going.”

More than 300,000 people have been killed in Columbia in a largely unreported civil war between government forces and left-wing guerrillas that has been going on for more than 30 years.

The killing fields of Cambodia - where more than 2 million people died in the 1970s at the hands of the murderous, US-backed Pol Pot regime - are still littered with land mines which continue to claim thousands of lives each year. Pol Pot is dead, but the killing goes on.

More than 3 million people have been killed in the fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where government forces, rebel groups and invading armies from several neighbouring countries have been embroiled in a bloody conflict for over a decade - a conflict the international community has done little to stop.

Numerous other conflicts in other parts of the world continue to claim more lives each year.

So where do the weapons used to deny people their most basic human rights come from?

According to the 2003 edition of the Small Arms Survey, 1,134 companies in at least 98 countries are involved in some aspect of small arms production. At least 30 countries are regarded as significant producers, with the United States and Russia dominating the global market. Between them, these two countries account for more than 70 per cent of total worldwide production of civilian firearms.

As the survey points out, “The majority of countries involved in the small arms trade still fail to produce comprehensive data on their annual arms exports and imports. A significant proportion of the global trade in small arms is conducted in secrecy, reinforcing an environment in which corruption and black markets thrive.”

Mary Robinson said: “The lack of data on the arms trade makes it easy for many of the weapons traded legally to end up in the wrong hands.”

Click on "comments" below to read or post comments

[Comments \(9\)](#)

Comment Guidelines

Be succinct, constructive and relevant to the story. We encourage engaging, diverse and meaningful commentary. Do not include personal information such as names, addresses, phone numbers and emails.

Comments falling outside our guidelines – those including personal attacks and profanity – are not permitted.

See our complete [Comment Policy](#) and [use this link to notify us](#) if you have concerns about a comment.

We'll promptly review and remove any inappropriate postings.

In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, this material is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. Information Clearing House has no affiliation whatsoever with the originator of this article nor is Information ClearingHouse endorsed or sponsored by the originator.)



Join our Daily News Headlines Email Digest

Fill out your email address
to receive our newsletter!

[Subscribe](#) [Unsubscribe](#)

[Powered by YourMailinglistProvider.com](#)

Hi
Please help support
Information Clearing
House. Click here now

amazon honor system
[Learn more.](#)

A promotional banner for the Amazon Honor System. It features a dark red border. The text is white and yellow. At the bottom, there is a dark red bar with the text "amazon honor system" in white and "Learn more." in a smaller font.

[HOME](#)

[COPYRIGHT NOTICE](#)