

PRESS BRIEFING

**WAANSA MARKS THE
GLOBAL DAY OF
ACTION
FOR AN ARMS TRADE
TREATY – 13
SEPTEMBER 2006**



**Mr. Baffour Dokyi Amoa,
Chairman, West Africa Action
Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)
President, Africa Forum on Small
Arms (AFoNSA)**

Brothers and Sisters of the Media,

The **West Africa Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)**, have invited you here today because 13th September 2006 marks the Global Day of Action for an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

Our objective in marking this day is to urge Governments to vote in support of

starting negotiations for an International Arms Trade Treaty at the forth-coming UN General Assembly in October 2006. **WAANSA** particularly is encouraging governments in the **ECOWAS** Sub-region to make public statements in support and to sponsor an Arms Trade Treaty before the United Nations General Assembly. We expect that our governments would consider including the ATT in their opening speeches at the UN.

WAANSA is concerned that although over 1000 people a day are killed by armed violence and many more are injured, there is currently no international legally binding instrument to effectively bring the trade in weapons under control. An Arms Trade Treaty is an essential step in prohibiting arms transfers to destinations where they are likely to be used to commit grave human rights violations, fuel conflict or undermine development. We are all witnesses to what happened in Dagbon here in Ghana and in La Cote d'Ivoire, what is happening in Darfur in the Sudan, Cassamance in Senegal and many other places around the globe.

This is why **WAANSA** welcomes the circulation by the Governments of Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and United Kingdom on 24 July this year, Draft UN Resolution entitled 'Effective control over the import, export, and transfer of conventional arms'. This will be tabled at the forthcoming First Committee at the UN General Assembly. This Resolution calls for the setting up of a Group of Governmental Experts "commencing no later than 2008, to examine the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally-

binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms.” The task of the Group of Governmental Experts would not be to NEGOTIATE the detailed text of an ATT; they will consider WHETHER an Arms Trade Treaty should be negotiated, as well as making suggestions for the eventual text.

During the First Committee at the UN General Assembly, governments will vote on whether to start negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty, to regulate international transfers of all conventional arms – not only small arms and light weapons. Conventional arms include warships, battle tanks, fighter jets, helicopters as well as assault rifles and handguns.

An Arms Trade Treaty initiative has been the primary goal of the growing international coalition. The ATT will cover all transfers, not simply exports. Thus, a country can be involved in an illicit arms deal, whether through importing, exporting, transit or transshipment.

Permit me, to give you a background of the UN Small Arms Process. The UN Small Arms Process is well-established, focussing on the non-binding Programme of Action on Small Arms. At Conferences such as the Bi-ennial Meeting of States, Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences, a lot of attention has been paid to international transfer controls, and the Control Arms Campaign has been promoting the Global Principles for Arms Transfers. It is these same principles that underlie the proposed ATT. The International Action Network

on Small Arms (IANSA) of which WAANSA is a member, is campaigning for the Global Principles to be adopted within the UN small arms process, and also incorporated within the future ATT. This ensures that in both processes, arms transfers would be linked to obligations under international law.

While welcoming the draft proposal, WAANSA is concerned that the current draft resolution makes no reference to the existing body of human rights law and standards. We are convinced that if the Resolution does not clearly outline States’ commitments to promote and protect human rights, there is grave risk that an ensuing ATT would not prevent the supply of weapons to the most serious abusers.

Out of the 192 States represented at the UN, at least half of these must vote in support of an Arms Trade Treaty for the resolution to be passed and for negotiations to begin. So far, fifty-five governments including Ghana have already broadly given their support for an Arms Trade Treaty or the Global Principles for International Arms Transfers.

The UN General Assembly is scheduled to begin on 18 September 2006, with the First Committee beginning on 2 October and continuing to the end of October.

In marking this day, WAANSA would like to plead with our governments to

Consider including the Arms Trade Treaty in their opening speeches at the United Nations General Assembly.

Consider voting in favour of the establishment of a negotiating process for an Arms Trade Treaty.

Again, in order to have an effective Arms Trade Treaty, WAANSA recommends change to the draft Resolution as follows:

to include reference to international human rights law in an operative paragraph.

to make reference to sustainable development and regional security and to acknowledge that the list of 'crime, conflict and terrorism and displacement of people' is not a complete list of the harmful impact of the unregulated arms trade.

to remove the word 'feasibility' and to instead state that the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) will directly 'examine the scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive legally binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export, transit and transshipment of conventional arms'.

To make an explicit reference to state that the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) should start work no later than January 2008.

Finally, while calling for support for the Arms Trade Treaty, as Chair of WAANSA, I would like to use this

opportunity to call on Governments, Parliamentarians and Civil Society Organisations in the West Africa sub-region to collaborate to ensure the speedy ratification of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons which was adopted this year by Heads of State and Governments. An action if swiftly carried would help curb the proliferation of small arms in our Sub-region. More importantly, with the ratification of the convention on small arms, local manufacture may be curtailed if not properly controlled.

To appreciate the magnitude of the small arms menace, I would like to quote some statistics¹. At present, there are about 640 million small arms in the world - one for every ten people on earth. The majority, 59% are in the hands of civilians. 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The gun trade is worth US\$4 billion a year, of which up to US\$1 billion may be unauthorised or illicit. Eight million new guns are manufactured every year by at least 1,249 companies in 92 countries. Ten to 14 billion units of ammunition are manufactured every year, which is enough to kill every person in the world twice over. No wonder we have escalation of armed robbery all over our Continent. In fact, when drugs and small arms proliferate they become weapons of mass destruction and we need to fight against them.

I thank you for your attention.

¹ These statistics are taken from the full text of the report, 2006: *Bringing the global gun crisis under control*, where they are footnoted.

