



25 July 2011

Saferworld and a history of the Arms Trade Treaty

Saferworld has been a leading member of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) coalition pressing for an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) since the very beginning. Starting out as a campaign for an “International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers” in 1996, the international movement gained a significant boost in 1997 when Oscar Arias’ Commission of Nobel Laureates—supported by a group of NGOs including Saferworld—called for an International Code.

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s Saferworld and NGO partners continued working to build support among governments, parliamentarians and NGOs for an international agreement to regulate the global arms trade. By 2001 the focus had shifted from a politically-binding International Code of Conduct to a legally-binding instrument and by 2003 the [Control Arms](#) Campaign was launched, calling for an international Arms Trade Treaty.

The campaign for an ATT was further energised in 2005 when Saferworld organised an event at which the then UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw announced the UK Government’s intention to work internationally for a global arms treaty. The following year the first UN General Assembly resolution calling for an ATT—co-authored by the governments of Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the UK—was passed with the overwhelming support of 153 UN Member States.

The 2006 resolution mandated the UN Secretary General to consult States on the “feasibility, scope and draft parameters of an Arms Trade Treaty” and within a year 101 States had submitted their views, making it the most successful exercise of its kind within the UN. The vast majority of States call for a comprehensive treaty based on international human rights law and international humanitarian law (IHL). In early 2008—pursuant to the 2006 UN GA Resolution—a 28-strong Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) was established to consider the question of an ATT. The Group met three times, and produced a report that concluded “further consideration of efforts within the UN to address the international trade in conventional arms [was] required”.

In December 2008 a second UN General Assembly resolution was passed establishing an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to further consider aspects of an eventual ATT. After two sessions of the OEWG in 2009 it was clear that there was significant support for an international ATT based upon existing legal obligations of states including the need to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as other well-established international norms such as the need to safeguard socio-economic development and to avoid contributing to internal or regional instability.

In December 2009 a third UN resolution was passed mandating the commencement of negotiations for an ATT with four weeks of substantive Preparatory Committee meetings (PrepComs), a procedural PrepCom and a four week Diplomatic Conference in 2012. Two weeks of PrepComs were held in July 2010 and a further one each in March and July 2011. The final procedural meeting will be held in February 2012 in advance of the Diplomatic Conference, which is scheduled for summer 2012 and at which the ATT is due

to be agreed. Significantly, the United States, which had been the only State to vote against the previous two ATT resolutions, voted in favour of the 2009 resolution.

Throughout the UN ATT process, Saferworld has been a key member of the NGO Control Arms Coalition working tirelessly for a robust and effective ATT. We have produced numerous reports and briefings on pertinent issues—including on the feasibility and scope of the ATT. We have also provided expert commentary on developments at the UN level and have been active advocates for a strong Treaty among governments from all world regions. In particular, Saferworld has become the leading NGO commentator on ATT implementation provisions by way of a specially dedicated project aimed at ensuring that the ATT eventually agreed includes provisions for reporting, monitoring and review and also provides for co-operation and assistance to support implementation efforts in developing countries.