

Disarmament and development: arms trade controls

This month's newsletter discusses once again the issue of disarmament and development. However, this time, the newsletter focuses on arms control mechanisms.

1.1 Disarmament and Development

Article 26 of the United Nations Charter refers to the link between disarmament and development, stating that armaments drain resources that could otherwise be used for human and economic concerns. This becomes especially evident in regions such as on the African continent where states have generally very limited resources.

With regard to the nexus of disarmament and development in this region, it is also worthwhile calling to mind what the British philosopher Mary Caldor wrote in her book "New and Old Wars". Caldor pointed out that in many of the internal conflicts now dominating the African continent, warlords and corrupt governments are not interested in resolving the conflicts as they are their source of income. Since these economies thrive on warfare, the people profiting from the conflicts are interested in keeping arms trade going, rather than the opposite.

In these regions, the greatest problems are created by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This is due to the particular kind of low intensity warfare. The terms "small arms and light weapons," as well as "low intensity warfare" insinuate that these weapons are less harmful than more powerful weaponry. However, on the African continent, as well as throughout the world, small arms and light weapons still account for the greatest death toll and as such have been referred to as "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion."

Advocacy groups such as Saferworld and Control Arms suggest that in order for disarmament in small arms and light weapons to be effective as well as sustainable, the warfare economies in question must be replaced by civil economies. Young men and women, such is the claim, must be given an alternative to gaining money from partaking in warfare. According to these NGOs, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons will never be achieved and even less sustained without economic and social development. On the contrary, the reduction of such weaponry is said to be completely dependent on development, which may therefore be viewed as a means to an end.

Disarmament and Human Security, by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva, Switzerland

This website provides research materials on issues related to the connection between human security and disarmament, such as landmines, gender, weapons for development, disarmament as humanitarian action etc.

Disarmament and Development, by the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, New York, US and Geneva, Switzerland

This website provides reports, press releases, official documents and resolution texts by various UN bodies on the connection between development and disarmament.

World Development Indicators 2005: Defense Expenditures and Arms Transfers, by the World Bank Group, Washington, DC, US

This website provides statistical data showing that high levels of defense spending burden the economy and may impede growth.

1.2 Arms Trade Control Mechanisms

On 26 October 2006 the UN General Assembly First Committee voted in favor of a resolution toward an arms trade treaty. This resolution may be viewed as the latest achievement in the area of arms control mechanisms. The resolution sets a timetable for the UN to establish a group of governmental experts who will consider the feasibility, scope and draft parameters of a legally-binding arms trade treaty and to report back to the General Assembly in 2008. It means that the resolution passed on October is only the first step on a long road toward an arms trade treaty. The special feature of the arms trade treaty is that it includes not only small arms and light weapons, but conventional weaponry in general.

UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, by iansa, London, UK

This website by the International Action Network on Small Arms provides current news and collects relevant information on the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

Reviewing Action on Small Arms 2006: Assessing the First Five Years of the UN Programme of Action

This report was published by Saferworld in London in 2006. It analyzes relevant local, national, regional and international processes and aims to provide a useful resource for states, regional and international organizations, civil society groups, experts and citizens.

Towards an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), by the UN General Assembly First Committee

This website by the UN Department of Public Information provides the transcript records of the UN GA First Committee meeting of 26 October 2006 in which the First Committee voted in favor of starting international discussions toward an arms trade treaty (ATT).

Towards an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT): Establishing Common International Standards for the Import, Export and Transfer of Conventional Arms

This is the text of the resolution passed on 26 October 2006 in the UN GA First Committee. The resolution is limited in scope inasmuch it only requests the secretary-general to seek the views of member states on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for an ATT, together with the request for a group of governmental experts provided with any assistance and services they need.

UN General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security

This website by the United Nations General Assembly's 61st session provides documentation and information on the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee's work.

GA 61 Session Disarmament Issues on the Agenda

This website by the United Nations General Assembly's 61st session provides the work agenda for the First Committee of the UN GA 61st session.

First Committee Monitor, by Reaching Critical Will, New York, US

The First Committee Monitor is a detailed weekly NGO report on the debates going on during the annual sessions of the UN General Assembly's First Committee (Disarmament and International Security). This website provides all the issues of the First Committee Monitor since 2003.

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, by the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, New York, US

The UN Register of Conventional Arms includes data on international arms transfers as well as information provided by member states on military holdings, procurement through national production and relevant policies.

United Nations Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures by the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, New York, US

This website provides the reports submitted by the member states, as well as reports and research papers by UN agencies on the UN Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.

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