

MEDIA RELEASE

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ARMS CONTROL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES CALL FOR LAW REFORM TO ENSURE OVERSIGHT, TRANSPARENCY ON ARMS DEALS

OTTAWA – The government of Canada must establish parliamentary oversight to ensure Canadian-made weapons will not be transferred to countries like Saudi Arabia, where there is a serious risk they will be used to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave human rights violations, say a group of arms control and human rights advocates.

Project Ploughshares, the Rideau Institute, Oxfam-Québec, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East and Amnesty International will testify before the Senate on Bill C-47, legislation that prepares Canada for accession to the UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), starting Wednesday, November 21.

While joining the ATT is a positive step for Canada, Bill C-47 is deeply flawed and fails to comply with the treaty's essential objective to "establish the highest possible common international standards" for regulating the arms trade.

The numerous shortcomings under Bill C-47 leave glaring loopholes in the country's export permit process, as outlined in a briefing document that has been presented to Senators. Those include:

- The failure to require that all US-destined military goods and technology require export control permits. Under the current Export and Import Permits Act (EIPA), only a small number of US-destined military goods require these permits. That means the majority of Canada's military exports remain unregulated.
- A provision exempting the Department of National Defence from the EIPA. This could create different, possibly contradictory, standards and outcomes on arms exports.
- The omission of the Canadian Commercial Crown Corporation, which plays a central role in exporting Canadian military goods, especially to the United States.
- A lack of any provision that limits confidentiality and ensures transparency around future arms contracts. With respect to the Saudi arms deal, we are told by the Government of Canada that the contract mandates a level of secrecy that is far beyond the normal bounds of commercial confidentiality. This level of secrecy severely undermines core principles of transparency and accountability, which underpin the ATT.
- A lack of oversight on future arms trade regulations. To better ensure proposed regulations fulfill ATT obligations, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) should establish procedures for mandatory parliamentary review of such regulations in advance of implementation.

The brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi – and the renewed attention to Saudi Arabia's responsibility for extensive war crimes in Yemen – has underscored the importance of preventing similar future arms deals.

It is particularly crucial that Bill C-47 be strengthened to ensure that arms exports to the US do not in turn lead to Canadian weapons, parts or components being further transferred on to countries where

there is a serious risk they will be used to commit grave human rights violations, thus safeguarding against the risk of Canada becoming complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Quotes

“The Arms Trade Treaty calls for the ‘highest possible common international standards.’ Yet Canada’s arrangement with the United States neither constitutes the highest possible standard nor is it consistent with the standards applied to others.”

- Cesar Jaramillo, Executive Director of Project Ploughshares

“The international Arms Trade Treaty is finally a chance for Canada and its allies to collectively say ‘no’ to arms sales to the most repressive governments of the world. Nevertheless, if C-47 passes in the Senate without amendment, Canada will accede to the ATT in name only. A failure by Canada to live up to the vision and intents of the ATT will result in incalculable misery and suffering around the world, especially in the Middle East, where there is already evidence of Canadian arms being used to commit human rights abuses.”

- Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

“In order for arms control reforms to truly ensure that Canada is compliant with the crucial obligations in the Arms Trade Treaty, it is imperative that Bill C-47 bring scrutiny and legal responsibility to all departments and agencies involved in negotiating, concluding and authorizing arms deals and contracts. That is presently not the case. Crucially, the Canadian Commercial Corporation remains outside of current arms control procedures and this is not addressed by Bill C-47. The deal to sell light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia and the now-abandoned contract to sell military helicopters to the Duterte government in the Philippines make it clear that the CCC has a central place in the Canadian arms industry. They must be subject to the obligations and expectations laid out in Bill C-47.”

- Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada

“Whenever the pressure builds to stop Canada’s unconscionable arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, we are told by the Government of Canada that some secret provision of the contract makes such action impossible. This level of secrecy – which is far beyond the normal bounds of commercial confidentiality – severely undermines transparency and accountability – core principles of the ATT and of democracy itself. “

- Peggy Mason, President of the Rideau Institute

“Transparency and parliamentary scrutiny are essential components of effective arms trade controls and oversight of arms sales is a job for Parliament. So we are strongly recommending the creation of a subcommittee empowered to examine all aspects of Canada’s arms exports procedures and policies, and also Canada’s role in international arms control agreements. Polls have showed that most Canadians disapprove of arms deals with human rights abusers. However, details on Canadian arms exports remain limited. A subcommittee would ensure oversight and increased transparency for Canadians on important imperatives such as arms sales to countries with dubious human rights records.”

- Anne Duhamel, Director of Policy with Oxfam-Québec

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