

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Reaction to the adoption of the first ever Arms Trade Treaty

Treaty makes it illegal to sell weapons if there is risk of gender-based violence

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New York

Today, governments adopted the text of the first ever Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) at the United Nations in New York. The treaty, which prohibits the sale of arms if there is a risk that the weapons could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law, is the first ever treaty that recognizes the link between gender-based violence and the international arms trade.

The Arms Trade Treaty text was adopted in the General Assembly with a vote of 154 in favor, 3 against, and 23 abstentions. The final UN negotiating conference failed to adopt the text by consensus on 28 March due to objections from Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Syria. In response, over 100 countries co-sponsored a draft General Assembly resolution calling for the adoption of the treaty text, which was successfully adopted on 2 April.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) welcomes the adoption of the treaty as a first step towards regulating international transfers of arms. However, the organization cautions that the treaty not sufficiently robust or comprehensive. The risk of legitimizing the international arms trade, especially irresponsible transfers, must be avoided through careful interpretation and implementation.

Treaty has binding provisions to prevent armed gender-based violence

WILPF ran a campaign during the ATT process to make prevention of gender-based violence legally binding in the treaty. Throughout the process, WILPF has pushed for recognition of the link between weapons and gender-based violence. With this final text, WILPF's calls have been respected. The strengthening of the preventing GBV criterion was supported by over 101 delegations, a historic number of states. This happened because of the strong mobilisation and campaigning done by civil society, and our work around "Make it binding" really gave concrete results. WILPF is already is planning on how to hold governments accountable to the commitments in the future. So [Join us](#). [Support us](#). [Work with us](#). Together, we have made a difference today and we should continue our work to make sure that arms sales are stopped when there's a risk of gender-based violence.

"Weapons increase the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and impede women's political participation around the world. The Treaty's explicit provision on gender-based violence not only recognizes the links between such violence and the arms trade, but makes it illegal to transfer weapons if there is a risk, for example, that the weapons will be used to facilitate rape," said Ray Acheson, the head of WILPF's Arms Trade Treaty work.

Treaty still has limitations and loopholes

While the adopted ATT text is stronger than previous drafts, it still contains substantial limitations and loopholes. As the treaty was negotiated between all countries in the world under the rule of consensus, the treaty's scope is narrow, providing only for consideration of a limited number of weapon systems. Its provisions covering ammunition, munitions, parts, and components are not comprehensive and it does not legally mandate states to increase transparency in the international arms trade. The treaty does not address concerns that major exporters themselves sometimes use arms to engage in violations of human rights or crimes of aggression.

However, the ATT text is only a starting point. Madeleine Rees, Secretary-General of WILPF says: *"The ATT process has shown a significant international mobilization against the negative humanitarian and human rights impacts of the international arms trade. Now, we must implement it with the strongest possible interpretation in order to do what the treaty first set out to do, reduce human suffering."*

ENDS

Facts about the treaty:

The UN process for an Arms Trade Treaty began in 2006. The final ATT text requires exporting states to assess the risk that the weapons being transferred could be used or diverted for the use of committing violations of human rights or international humanitarian law, including acts of gender-based violence or violence against children, or for contributing to terrorism or transnational organized crime such as human trafficking. The ATT also requires states not to authorize any transfers of arms that risk undermining peace and security. The treaty will open for signature on 3 June 2013.

Facts about WILPF:

WILPF was founded in 1915 in The Hague, Netherlands, by women from around the world protesting the violence and destruction of World War I. Today it has National Sections in nearly 40 countries. Its work on disarmament, arms control, and the arms trade is led by its programme Reaching Critical Will (www.reachingcriticalwill.org). WILPF national sections and programmes have been engaged in the work on Arms Trade Treaty for several years at all levels.

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Background

[Text of Arms Trade Treaty](#)

[Other documents and statements from the conference](#)

[Arms Trade Treaty Monitor](#), providing civil society perspectives on the negotiations

[Summary of Gender and Arms Trade Treaty](#)