



UNA-UK

United Nations Association-UK
3 Whitehall Court
London SW1A 2EL

T: +44 (0) 20 7766 3450
F: +44 (0) 20 7930 5893
E: daws@una.org.uk
W: www.una.org.uk

Rt Hon. Margaret Beckett MP
Secretary of State
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

2 October 2006

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I would like to offer the UNA-UK's strong support for the government's efforts to negotiate an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) at the United Nations.

We believe that such a treaty will help to curb irresponsible and illegal transfers of weapons and ammunition. Such transfers often serve to prolong and exacerbate violent conflict and undermine prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Existing international provisions governing arms transfers by states are inadequate, ineffective and frequently flouted.

UNA-UK was very encouraged by the announcement made on 15 March 2005 by then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that the UK government would promote the negotiation of an ATT at the UN. We welcome the draft General Assembly resolution, being sponsored by the UK and six other governments, calling for negotiations towards such a treaty to be opened. However, we have two reservations about the operative paragraph, which calls for the establishment 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".

First, the terminology used in the draft resolution provides legitimacy for governments opposed to an ATT to argue against it on the grounds that it is not "feasible". At least 50 member states – including the members of the European Union – have expressed their broad support for the treaty, as have large numbers of civil society organisations. They deeply believe such a treaty is both necessary and implementable. While we cannot prevent opponents from putting forward arguments about feasibility, we believe it would be a serious tactical error to set this criterion out in a way which puts it on an equal footing with the other considerations.

Second, we question the rather dilatory deadline for the process as it lacks the urgency required to drive forward progress on this long-standing issue.

UNA-UK will be submitting a resolution to the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) at its 38th Plenary Assembly in Buenos Aires in November 2006. We will be urging other UN Associations around the world to lobby their respective governments in support of an ATT.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Chair, UNA-UK