WILPF Toolkit for the Arms Trade Treaty

On 2–27 July 2012, all UN member states will gather in New York for the negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Civil society has been pushing for an international treaty to control the arms trade for decades. There are currently no legally-binding international standards for the export, import, or brokering of conventional weapons. The process to negotiate an ATT, which began at the United Nations in 2006, will be an excellent opportunity to demand that arms transfers are not conducted when they will be used to violate international humanitarian law or human rights, or undermine socioeconomic development or the environment.

WILPF believes that an ATT should not merely be used as a procedural authorization of arms transfers. It should be a strong tool with the primary purpose of preventing armed conflict, preventing the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, and seriously reducing the culture and economy of militarism. A strong ATT can help build the foundations for not just the regulation but also the reduction of the arms trade, along with the reduction of militarism throughout politics and society, reduction of military spending, and redirection of economic resources.

This toolkit is for all WILPF Sections and Branches, and other interested civil society groups. It includes background information on the ATT, talking points to be considered when meeting with your national representatives, and materials and resources from WILPF and other NGOs working on achieving a robust and meaningful arms trade treaty. It also includes information about the policy paper that WILPF, along with Amnesty International, the IANSA Women’s Network, and Religions for Peace have developed advocating for the inclusion of a specific gender criterion in the negotiated text.

Reaching Critical Will, WILPF’s disarmament project, will monitor the negotiation conference and provide analysis and advocacy. As with the four preparatory committees leading up to these negotiations, RCW will be posting statements and documents online and will coordinate, edit, and contribute a daily newsletter, the ATT Monitor. You can subscribe to receive the ATT Monitor each day during the negotiations.

In peace,

Ray Acheson
Project Director, Reaching Critical Will
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Background information on the ATT

Since the early 1990s, an active civil society campaign has been promoting the negotiation of a robust, comprehensive, legally-binding treaty to establish standards and restrictions on the international trade in conventional arms. Reaching Critical Will has prepared some background on the history of the UN process and elements of the proposed treaty.

- Brief history of the UN process
- Elements of the treaty

WILPF papers and articles on the ATT

- WILPF position on an international arms trade treaty
- Beyond an ATT, Ray Acheson of Reaching Critical Will/WILPF, February 2011
- The ATT, women, and gender, Emma Rosengren, WILPF Sweden, February 2011
- See the ATT Monitor from the four preparatory committees for more WILPF writing

Joint policy paper on gender and the ATT

Four international organizations—Amnesty International, the Women’s Network of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and Religions for Peace—have united to support a strong ATT and the inclusion of a specific gender criterion in the negotiated text. We have launched a Joint Policy Paper on Gender and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which outlines our position. If the ATT is to be an effective legal instrument in regulating the international arms trade, recognition of the potential gendered impacts of international transfers must also be included.

We are calling for a specific criterion in the treaty to “require States not to authorize an international transfer of conventional arms where there is a substantial risk that the arms under consideration are likely to be used to perpetrate or facilitate acts of gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.”

WILPF Sections and members are asked to support this call by taking action in your own countries before the final negotiations in July 2012:

1. Your section can endorse the call for a criteria – click here >>
2. Lobby your government at national level - See template letter >>
3. Share the campaign and paper with your contacts (by email, facebook, twitter etc).
4. Let us know what you/your section is doing so we can share.

Talking points for meetings with government representatives or for op-eds

All WILPF members are encouraged to meet with their government officials to discuss the upcoming ATT negotiations. Lobbying at the local and national levels is absolutely vital to successful negotiations at the international level. By coordinating with WILPF members around the world meeting with their governments to discuss the ATT, Reaching Critical Will will be in a much stronger position to engage with governments at the UN.
Some key talking points include:

- WILPF supports the latest consolidated draft of the Chair's paper. It should be used as the basis for negotiations. While the paper is not perfect, it provides a solid foundation from which we can move forward.

- Strong criteria on international humanitarian law, human rights, sustainable development, and prevention of sexual- and gender-based violence must be at the heart of the ATT.

- Small arms and light weapons and ammunition must be included in the treaty, along with all other categories of conventional weapons.

- Police and internal security equipment should also be included in the treaty. Excluding such items would have serious implications for human rights abuses, such as those witnessed during the Arab Spring.

- The ATT's criteria must not be restricted only to exports of conventional weapons. The criteria must also apply to imports, transit and transshipment, and brokering.

- The treaty should elaborate specifications for national reports on all arms transfers and should require states to publicly declare this information.

- The ATT should include a gender perspective in its criteria for arms transfers, including by restricting states parties from authorizing an arms transfer where there is a substantial risk that the arms under consideration are likely to be used to perpetrate or facilitate acts of gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.

- Members of civil society accredited to the ATT process should be allowed as observers throughout all meetings of the negotiating conference, including informal meetings.

If you want more ideas for talking points or for writing an op-ed to your local newspapers, a comprehensive set of requests can be found in WILPF's position paper.

Materials and resources

Reaching Critical Will's web pages on the arms trade treaty have lots of background information, papers, primary documents, reporting, analysis, advocacy, and more.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has an official ATT website with lots of documentation and information about the UN process to negotiate a treaty.

The Control Arms Campaign has information on past and present campaigns to achieve an ATT.