

Is Australia arming human rights abuses?



Australia has an obligation to ensure its military trade does not support human rights abuses. The Arms Trade Treaty, which Australia championed, is falling short of its vision to reduce harms from the military industry globally. Australia's current military trade architecture fails basic standards of public accountability and undermines the vision of the Arms Trade Treaty. Australia should review and amend our infrastructure to provide transparency and as an example of global best practice and leadership in arms control.

- 1 Global military expenditure is USD\$2.4 trillion p/a, 10 times development assistance.** The historical lack of regulation of the arms trade has massive implications for global human security. The industry is responsible for 40% of global corruption
- 2 The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) came into force 10 years ago, with Australia playing a pivotal role in its formation.** The ATT establishes global standards, forbidding arms sales when there is a risk of them being used to violate human rights.
- 3 Recent Australian Governments have set a goal for Australia to become one of the ten largest military exporters globally.**
- 4 Australia's military industry is opaque** – Government Departments report vastly different information using different methodologies and data sources. In 2023-4 the Department of Defence issued permits for over \$100billion of exports; and DFAT reported \$2.7 billion of actual exports.
- 5 Australia's military industry is growing rapidly.** Australia has doubled its percentage share of global military exports of major arms in four years. DFAT and ABS data indicates actual exports may have doubled in three years.
- 6 Neither the Australian public nor the parliament know what weapons (including components) are being exported,** by what companies, to whom or for what purpose. Not even the Department of Defence, which issues export permits, knows what is actually being exported.
- 7 Australia has recently exported to regimes where there are serious human rights concerns-** Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Philippines, Sudan, South Sudan, Israel, Indonesia. Because of the lack of public information, it is unclear whether these exports have directly facilitated human rights abuses.
- 8 The Arms Trade Treaty Monitor concludes that Australia's ATT reports lack meaningful transparency.**
- 9 European countries with similar or higher levels of military exports fulfill their transparency obligations much more effectively than Australia.**
- 10 A recent report funded by the Australian and UK governments reported eroding levels of transparency globally,** significantly impacting on the efficacy of the Arms Trade Treaty. It concluded the Treaty has failed to make clearly observable progress towards the objective of reducing human suffering.



Australia needs to establish processes for our military trade to be both transparent and accountable.

Quakers Australia is calling for a parliamentary inquiry to review the entirety of the current system regulating military exports and imports. *The following are some policy suggestions that could be explored by such an inquiry.*

1

Allow parliamentary scrutiny of both the export permits and the overall defence trade process

A Parliamentary committee could review permit applications prior to export licence approval, as well as review overall defence import and export policies and recommend changes.

2

Detailed public reporting of all actual military exports and imports

This would include detailed information about specific actual weapons exports and imports, and report this against export permits; and include information about trade with AUKUS partners which no longer require export permits.

3

Centralising the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in the process

DFAT would be responsible for the entire process – from licensing to end use reporting – so the Australian public can be confident there is appropriate monitoring of our international obligations. This could be modeled on the Australian Safeguards and Non-proliferation Office (ASNO).

4

Make process for export approvals transparent

This includes disclosing how the legislative criteria are applied for assessing permits, and ensuring criteria explicitly include our obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty, including assessing risks of gender-based violence and violence against women and children.

5

Implement actual end use monitoring of exports

This would require adopting best practice of post-delivery control mechanisms, including the use of delivery verification certificates, and on-site end-use monitoring.

6

Review import policies to establish clear ethical criteria

7

Strengthen contributions to ATT engagement program

Boost contributions to mechanisms for implementing vision of the ATT, including funding programs in our region to deal with weapons diversion.

“...we now need to move the ATT to the next level. This requires us to go back to the object and purpose of the Treaty. The focus should increasingly be on transparency, accountability and cooperation.”

Peter Woolcott, Australian former Ambassador and President of Treaty Negotiations Conference
Keynote Address to Conference of the State Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty, August 2024