

Voices from the South



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Nigerian insecurity: An effective ATT is the answer

Small arms and light weapons have been called the “weapon of mass destruction of the poor”. These and other conventional arms kill, injure, and tear up families and communities across the world. They prolong armed conflicts, and fuel poverty. But unlike the trade in other items, like food or drugs, the trade in arms is not subject to any international regulation.

Churches and social movements that are eye-witnesses to the harmful effects of these weapons have long advocated for international regulation that will reduce the suffering caused by easy access to arms.

In July 2012, the world’s governments will gather in New York to negotiate a legally binding international treaty on trade in conventional weapons. The following article is a reflection by Rev. Kolade Fadahunsi, Programme

Officer for “Churches in Action For Peace and Development” (CAPAD) in Nigeria, on the necessity of a strong international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) for Nigerians:

Nigeria is the most populous country in the West Africa Sub region and most economically buoyant.

Locally, however, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has contributed largely to instability and insecurity in the country.

More than 1,135 companies, in more than 98 countries worldwide are involved in some aspect of production of small arms, ammunition and/or components.

These weapons are brought into the delta from various locations. Most of the assault rifles are supplied by illegal dealers and sellers. Nigeria has very porous

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borders on both its land and sea edges which make such illegal importations of weapons into the country easier. The smugglers use speed boats to connect with ships on the high seas, and then ferry the arms back to shore.

SALW and groups misusing them are dangerously out of control especially in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Incidentally, the Niger Delta is the hub of oil and gas production in the country. Despite this position, there is poverty, high unemployment, injustice which breeds organized crime and illicit arms trafficking and proliferation in the zone.

This has contributed largely to instability and insecurity in the country. It has fuelled religious and communal crisis.

A March 2011 regional report by the Preparatory Committee for an Arms Trade Treaty (PREPCON)

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Photo: Cross made from spent bullets from Liberia. Credit: WCC.



Photo: Rev. Kolade Fadahunsi, Programme Officer, CAPAD Nigeria

summarized the situation well: *“Given the incredible loss of life, of Women, Children and the aged as well as the effects upon socio-economic development of Nigeria, there is need to call for increased regulation of conventional arms.”*

It is an understatement to say that insecurity as a result of proliferation of Arms and ammunition in Nigeria has a negative impact on the religious life of the Nigerian Christians.

While this is not unique to Christians, as insecurity has become a national concern, the Christian experience is of great concern, as people now worship in fear, while other have abandoned their traditional homes.

What the **Ecumenical Campaign on Arms Trade Treaty** has achieved for Churches in Nigeria, however, is that it has

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projected the Church in the light of working for a permanent solution to the problem.

The campaign is advocating for a responsible trade in arms. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons that crosses in the country is a major component of this.

The urgency of a strong Arms Trade Treaty can be seen by the role Nigeria is playing in the region through Economic Committee of West Africa States (ECOWAS). Since 2010, both the ECOWAS and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been engaged in a partnership to promote the attainment of an ATT through regional level consultations and agreements.

These initiatives have inspired efforts to develop and agree on an African Common Position (ACP), which is awaiting endorsement by the African Union’s Security Council.

It is no longer a secret that the proliferation of conventional weapons and ammunition, including small arms and light

weapons, and their irresponsible transfer were aggravating human suffering, repression, crime, destabilization of national security, violation of arms embargoes and human rights abuse. This shows the importance of the upcoming UN Conference on ATT.

It is urgent that States negotiate an Arms Trade Treaty that would establish common international standards for responsible trade because there are lives for whom this decision will make a difference, especially of Nigerian Christians.

To learn more about the WCC’s ATT Campaign, and to follow this summer’s events, click the hand logo here:



INTERFAITH DECLARATION IN SUPPORT OF AN ARMS TRADE TREATY

Every year, communities are divided or destroyed and millions of people are killed, injured, raped, and forced to flee from their homes as a result of war and armed violence. The poorly regulated global trade in conventional arms and ammunition fuels conflict, poverty, gender-based violence and human rights abuses. Such injustices are an affront to human dignity and the sacredness of life.

As the world's governments convene to negotiate a global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), we, as religious leaders and communities, faith groups and faith-based organizations urge them to negotiate in good faith an effective ATT that will reduce the human suffering caused by irresponsibly traded weapons.

While existing national, sub-regional, and regional regulations are important, they are not enough to stop irresponsible transfers of arms and ammunition between countries. That is why a global treaty for arms trade that sets binding standards for arms transfers is needed. A strong ATT will clarify and set obligations under international law and thereby reduce the human cost associated with the proliferation of all conventional arms. Furthermore, an ATT will make it easier to distinguish between legal and illegal trade and elucidate when an arms transfers should be prohibited. A comprehensive agreement will also help close existing loopholes that make the diversion of arms possible.

In 2009, a¹ UN General Assembly resolution established a process for elaborating an ATT with preparatory committee meetings in 2010 and 2011 and a four-week UN Conference in 2012 that seeks to produce a “legally binding instrument on the highest possible common international standards for the transfer of conventional arms.”

The summer 2012 conference is rapidly approaching and the world's leaders have a moral responsibility to ensure that a robust treaty is negotiated. At a minimum, the ATT should establish that no international transfers of arms and ammunition will take place if there is a substantial risk that the transfer will be used in serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law or impair poverty reduction or socio-economic development.

As religious leaders, faith groups and faith-based organisations we strongly welcome these steps toward a negotiated ATT. We call upon the member states of the United Nations to negotiate and deliver a strong and effective ATT that has real impact on people's lives.

We raise our collective voice to call on all governments to work together to save lives and end the human suffering caused by irresponsible transfers of conventional arms. Furthermore, we urge governments to remain mindful of the humanitarian imperative that drives this process and find a solution that moves all nations further along the path to peace and development.

This is a chance for all involved to make history, to uphold human dignity, and to save lives.

¹ In December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution A/Res/64/48 “The arms trade treaty” by a overwhelming majority of 151 yes votes.