

UN adopts landmark treaty regulating global arms trade

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USPA News - The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday overwhelmingly voted to approve a global arms trade treaty that prohibits states from transferring conventional weapons, ranging from light weapons to warships, when they know those weapons will be used to facilitate war crimes. Several countries, including the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia and Argentina, have sought to secure an Arms Trade Treaty at the United Nations since they authored the original UN Resolution in 2006. But despite overwhelming support of a majority of member states, representatives from Iran, North Korea and Syria blocked its adoption by consensus last week.

During Tuesday's vote at the UN General Assembly, during which 97 votes were needed to secure a simply majority, the treaty received 154 votes in favor, three votes against and 23 abstentions. The treaty will be opened for signature in New York on June 3 and will enter into force 90 days after it is ratified by the 50th signatory. The treaty will prohibit states from transferring conventional weapons to other countries when they know those weapons will be used to commit or facilitate genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Such conventional weapons include small arms, tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles and missile launchers. However, according to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, the treaty will not interfere with domestic arms commerce or the right to bear arms within member states. It will also not prevent the export of any type of weapon, harm the legitimate right to self-defense by states, or undermine national arms regulation standards already in place. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the adoption of the first-ever Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), describing it as a "historic diplomatic achievement" that is the result of long-held dreams and many years of effort. "This is a victory for the world's people," he said in New York. "The ATT will make it more difficult for deadly weapons to be diverted into the illicit market and it will help to keep warlords, pirates, terrorists, criminals and their like from acquiring deadly arms," Ban said. "It will be a powerful new tool in our efforts to prevent grave human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law. And it will provide much-needed momentum for other global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts." U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry also welcomed the adoption and said it can help strengthen global security while protecting the sovereign right of states to conduct legitimate arms trade. "It will help reduce the risk that international transfers of conventional arms will be used to carry out the world's worst crimes, including terrorism, genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes," he said. Kerry stressed that the treaty will only apply to international trade and will not deprive American citizens of their right to keep and bear arms. "As the United States has required from the outset of these negotiations, nothing in this treaty could ever infringe on the rights of American citizens under our domestic law or the Constitution, including the Second Amendment," he said. Brian Wood, Head of Arms Control and Human Rights at Amnesty International, described ATT as a historic treaty. "Despite Iran, North Korea and Syria's deeply cynical attempt to stymie it, the overwhelming majority of the world's nations have shown resounding support for this lifesaving treaty with human rights protection at its core," he said. Wood added: "When you think of the huge economic interest and the political power in play for the big arms producers and exporters, this treaty is a tribute to both civil society who championed the idea to save lives and reduce human suffering as well as the governments who heeded that call. In the next four years, the annual trade in conventional weapons, ammunition and components and parts will exceed \$100 billion. But today, states have put human beings and their security first."

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