

My name is Mike Merriman-Lotz. I'm the Just Peace Global Policy Director for the American Friends Service Committee. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. Given ongoing realities in the West Bank where well-documented systematic violations of Palestinian human rights by the Israeli military and armed civilians are escalating, and in Gaza where the ICJ has ruled that Israeli military actions may be genocidal, the American Friends Service Committee has significant concerns about the failure of states' parties and signatories to the ATT to live into their Article 6 and Article 7 obligations. The increase in U.S. small arms sales and transfers to Israel since October 7 in particular are concerning. And while we recognize and understand that the U.S. is a signatory and not a state party to the ATT, we believe Israel's years of systematic human rights abuses against Palestinians and of its general context should lead to limitations on arms transfers regardless. In early November 2023, Israel requested the export of 24,000 semi-automatic and automatic assault rifles from the US for use by the military, police, and paramilitary groups. The transfer went forward despite concerns within the U.S. State Department that these weapons would be used to commit abuses in both Gaza and the West Bank, particularly by settlers. These and other weapons transfers to Israel by the U.S. are now being used in the commission of a possible genocide in Gaza. In the last three months of 2023, the U.S. exported 71,000 firearms to Israel and over 23 million worth of bullets. The exported firearms are more than 10 times the annual average number of handguns and rifles exported to Israel during the previous five years.

The Israeli Ministry of National Security is providing some of these weapons to 600 civilian security squads, including in illegal settlements in the West Bank. No risk assessment framework prevents these weapons from being used in the West Bank or in Gaza. As these security squads have formed, armed attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank by settlers, often in coordination with soldiers, have grown. At least 15 villages have been completely depopulated. At least 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, over 40% of them children. Another 60,000 have been injured. Small arms are responsible for many of these deaths and injuries, but despite evidence of abuses, no arms embargoes against Israel are in place. This makes clear the need for effective implementation of Article 6 and 7 of the ATT by both states, parties, and signatories.

Effective review and accountability mechanisms are needed to stop the transfer of weapons into situations where abuses are likely to occur, mechanisms the US government has actively refused to use in relation to weapons transfers to Israel. We hope that this meeting and the conversations over the coming days will help

strengthen ATT implementation and accountability mechanisms so that Palestinians and people in any other context impacted by conflict are protected from violence, human rights abuses, and war crimes resulting from arms transfers.

Thank you.