



ICRC

Speech given by Mr Peter Maurer

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Arms Trade Treaty
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Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, we are witnessing brutal wars raging in many countries around the world, such as in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan and Somalia. Urban violence is skyrocketing in Latin America and newer wars have emerged in recent years in places like Ukraine.

We see an ever-increasing loss of civilian life from indiscriminate attacks; the destruction of essential water and electricity services; hospitals and health workers targeted; and people forced from their homes. As a result we see injury, famine and epidemics claim even more lives. In some contexts, the victims of direct attacks are now surpassed by the victims of the indirect consequences of attacks which disrupt and destroy basic social services.

The economic toll too is vast – with conflict estimated to cost the global economy \$13.6 trillion annually or as much as 13% of global GDP.

Armed conflicts and violence are fueled by a steady supply of arms and ammunition. Weapons transfers are at their highest levels since the end of the Cold War. Arms continue to flow – overtly and covertly – to belligerents and violent extremists in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and they feed organized crime in the Americas.

ICRC research confirms that when conventional arms are poorly regulated and widely available, the humanitarian consequences are grim: violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, restricted medical and humanitarian assistance, prolonged armed conflicts, and high levels of armed violence and insecurity... even after wars have ended.

It's a sobering picture. Three years into the Arms Trade Treaty, there is an urgent need to turn words into deeds, and to prevent the devastating and irreparable harm that is caused when weapons fall into the wrong hands.

With 92 States already party to the Treaty, it is widely accepted that arms and ammunition are not just another form of commercial good. We call on those States not yet party, to show their commitment to act responsibly in the arms trade, by joining the Treaty, and making it a truly universal legal instrument.

The words of the Treaty remain hollow if they are not matched with actions, and result in changes in policies and behaviors. All too often, when I visit ICRC operations, I see the gap between promise and implementation, between the law and respect for the law, and the suffering that results.

Recently in Yemen I saw how the war is eroding almost every aspect of people's lives. The arms trade is rife and continues to flow despite repeated violations of international humanitarian law. Public services have been bombed, the health system is on its knees, and an unprecedented cholera epidemic has broken out. I met mothers forced to make impossible decisions about whether to buy food or expensive medicines for their families.

And of course, it is not only Yemen. In many of the places where ICRC works, we see what happens when wars are fought without limits.

In South Sudan last month I was struck by how the unending cycle of violence has caused a third of the population, four million people, to flee their homes. The fighting appears calibrated to maximize misery and is aided by an unchecked trade and

proliferation of small arms. I saw boys who could not have been more than ten years old carrying guns, boys who should be in school, not fighting a war.

Mr President,

There is an urgent need for all States – both in and outside of the treaty – to take an honest look at how their actions and their inactions are perpetuating cycles of violations, insecurity and suffering at tremendous human, economic and societal costs. To put it in slightly different terms: failing to manage the supply chain, without regard to how weapons will be used, is putting a dirt cheap price on the lives of civilians.

All those involved in the arms trade have a special responsibility to ensure that the recipients respect International Humanitarian Law. This is a critical and influential role because they are providing the means by which the conflict is fought – and violations are committed. States exporting arms have both the responsibility and the power to ensure that they do not supply arms that will be used to commit or facilitate violations of IHL and human rights.

Before making a decision to transfer arms, they must consider a variety of safeguards including ensuring good management of arms stockpiles, training the recipients in IHL and human rights, and more generally ensuring the recipients have the means to live up to their IHL and human rights obligations.

And if warring parties clearly do not comply with the law, or when there is a substantial risk of weapons misuse, then the weapons must not be transferred at all.

I hear concerns that responsible arms trade may entail certain short-term economic and political costs. But these will be largely overridden by the long-term gains in civilian protection and safer communities, and will ultimately lay the foundation for international and regional peace, security and stability.

Mr. President,

Over the last three years, States Parties have set solid foundations for the treaty's implementation, through establishing the ATT Secretariat, permanent Working Groups, and the Voluntary Trust Fund.

It's now time for States Parties to focus on implementing their Treaty obligations to the highest standards, including on the hard issues. High standards of implementation are critical to the treaty's credibility as a global framework for the responsible arms trade.

A high level of openness and transparency in implementation will also build cooperation and confidence in the treaty, and build momentum for more States to adhere to the treaty and strengthen universalization efforts.

The ATT is a blueprint for action by all States, individually and together. I encourage you in your discussions this week to continue to openly tackle the realities that we face. This is a big challenge, but it is an essential one if we are to turn words into deeds and protect communities from the worst brutalities of war.

Thank you.