

Embargo-Breaking Arms Dealers 'Getting Away With Murder'

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Weapons traffickers are 'getting away with murder' by flouting United Nations arms embargoes, according to a report out today.

Every one of 13 UN bans in place over the past decade has been repeatedly violated but only a handful of people prosecuted despite hundreds of embargo breakers being named in UN reports, it says.

Campaigners are calling for embargoes to be strengthened and an international arms trade treaty enabling countries to co-operate on arms control.

The Control Arms Campaign, which brings together Oxfam International, Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms, is today presenting its report to the UN Security Council.

Irene Khan, Amnesty's Secretary General, said: 'Over the past ten years systematic violations of United Nations arms embargoes have met with almost no successful prosecutions.

'Unscrupulous arms dealers continue to get away with grave human rights abuses and make a mockery of the UN Security Council's efforts.' According to the report:

UN investigative teams are given 'woefully inadequate' resources and time to monitor the embargoes.

Despite the embargoes being legally binding under international law, many states have not made violating them a criminal offence.

Arms export, import and freight documents are routinely faked and state officials often cover up arms transfers.

Oxfam director Barbara Stocking said: 'Illegal arms dealers are getting away with murder on a daily basis. Embargoes must be strengthened but even then they will remain a blunt instrument.

'They are often imposed by the UN Security Council on the basis of politics rather than principles and are usually deployed too late to save lives.

'The world urgently needs an Arms Trade Treaty if we're to stop weapons getting into the wrong hands.'

Campaigners say an arms trade treaty would provide a 'broader framework' to stop weapons being sold before wars start or human rights abuses reach their peak.

Some 45 countries, including Britain, have stated their support for such a treaty since October 2003, they say.

There are currently UN arms embargoes against the Ivory Coast, Liberia and Somalia as well as groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, as well as al-Qaida.

In the last decade there have also been embargoes on Angolan armed rebels (1992-2002), Ethiopia and Eritrea (2000-2001), Iraq (1990-2003), Libya (1992-2003) and the former Yugoslavia (1991-1996; 1998-2001).