



Statement at First Committee, October 12, 2016

Delivered by Anna Macdonald

Mr Chair,

"We go to sleep at night not knowing if we will wake up alive". These are the words of Ammar Hussain, a 14 year old boy in Sana'a, Yemen.

Just a few days ago, Saudi planes bombed a funeral party in Sana'a. 140 people were killed and over 500 wounded. This was a particularly shocking tragedy, but only the latest in a long-running pattern of indiscriminate attacks. Schools, hospitals, markets, mosques and funerals are not military targets. There has been justified condemnation from many. But strong statements are not enough – governments must stop the arms supplies that are enabling these attacks on civilians.

A year ago in this plenary, the Control Arms Coalition spoke of how the humanitarian crisis in Yemen epitomised the need for international arms control. Tragically, one year later, it remains one of the world's worst arms-fueled crises. The majority of the population are now dependent on food aid. Humanitarian agencies report many children are on the brink of starvation.

In the words of UN SG Ban Ki Moon, delivered in February this year: *"Yemen is in flames...We need states that are party to the Arms Trade Treaty to set an example in fulfilling one of the treaty's main purposes – controlling arms flows to actors that may use them in ways that breach international humanitarian law."*

Primary responsibility for the war crimes committed in Yemen rests with the combatants, be they Houthi, or members of the Saudi-led coalition, or any other combatant. But it is illegal for States Parties and signatories to the ATT to transfer arms where they know the arms will be used to commit those crimes. And even if States continue insisting that they do not know this, the overriding risk that the arms being transferred could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of humanitarian or human rights law is astoundingly clear.

It is encouraging that some States, for example Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, have taken steps to amend their arms export policies with regard to the Yemen conflict. But it is appalling that States Parties, signatories and aspirant states, including France,



the UK, the US and Canada continue to authorise weapon transfers to Saudi Arabia or any of its coalition partners in this context.

Governments are, rightly, speaking out against the horrific slaughter of civilians in Aleppo, and the appalling death-toll in the continuing Syrian conflict. Any states supplying arms to the Assad regime, or to those who may use them in violation of humanitarian law or for terrorist acts, must cease transfers immediately. The exodus of refugees from Syria forced to flee is another tragic consequence of this crisis. While governments are focused on the plight of refugees, it is also essential they do more to address the causes of displacement, including the continual fueling of conflict and human rights abuses through uncontrolled transfers of arms and ammunition.

Control Arms places great importance on the inclusion of gender-based violence within the risk assessment criteria in the ATT. The recent shocking incidences of mass rape at gunpoint in July in South Sudan, where hundreds of women and girls were raped, including aid-workers, demonstrates the need for governments to be rigorously applying this criteria.

One of the stated objectives of the ATT is to bring greater transparency. The arms trade is the world's most corrupt business, responsible for around 40% of corruption in all global trading. Secrecy breeds corruption, costs public money, and undermines development. Greater transparency can help stop illegal sales, reduce the risk of arms being diverted to terrorist groups and criminals; stop the flood of weapons to human rights abusers, and stop the arms that are being used to violate humanitarian law in too many communities on too many days. Public reporting is a key transparency mechanism that will help assess how the ATT is being applied in practice, and Control Arms calls on States Parties to publicly report.

The men, women and children being shot and bombed every day do not have the luxury of time. We call on all States to immediately join, and rigorously apply the ATT, in particular the core human rights and humanitarian provisions in Articles 6 and 7.

We call on you all to use the power that you have, and to not leave civilians who are suffering waiting any longer.

Thank you.