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Press Release

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Project Ploughshares to manage international civil society efforts in support of an Arms Trade Treaty

Waterloo, ON - Project Ploughshares announced today that it will manage a one-year program to support international civil society efforts to achieve an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the United Kingdom is contributing £323,000 from its Strategic Programme Fund, with an option to renew the funding for a second year.

The overwhelming majority of United Nations (UN) member states agree that an Arms Trade Treaty is needed to control the trade in conventional arms so that transfers that aggravate armed conflicts and human rights violations are stopped. The United Kingdom has taken a leading role among states in the campaign to secure an ATT through the UN. This financial support is an acknowledgement of the key role that civil society played in the successful disarmament negotiations that resulted in the Mine Ban Treaty of 1997 (the Ottawa Convention) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008.

Project Ploughshares, a Canadian disarmament and peacebuilding organization based in Waterloo, Ontario, is a founding member of the ATT Steering Committee that was formed in 2000 to secure resolutions at the UN that would initiate negotiations leading to an ATT. Other members of the Steering Committee include Amnesty International, the Arias Foundation of Costa Rica, Oxfam, Viva Rio of Brazil, and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). Project Ploughshares Senior Program Associate Ken Epps will manage the program with guidance from ATT Steering Committee members.

A December 24, 2008 resolution of the UN General Assembly, passed by 133 states, established a process towards an international treaty to better regulate cross-border transfers of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons. Begun in March 2009, an Open-Ended Working Group has been mandated by the General Assembly to determine the areas of consensus that could form the basis for a treaty.

To guide the drafting of an Arms Trade Treaty, the ATT Steering Committee has promoted core principles that are based on existing state commitments under international human rights and humanitarian law. To be effective an ATT must incorporate mechanisms that ensure transparency, monitoring, and compliance, and must hold states parties accountable for responsible transfers of conventional arms across borders.

In welcoming the UK FCO financial contribution to the work of the ATT Steering Committee, John Siebert, Executive Director of Project Ploughshares, commented: "The treaties on landmines and cluster munitions represent important building blocks in an arms control regime

that restricts weapons that target civilians indiscriminately. The Arms Trade Treaty will govern the movement across borders of a much wider variety of weapons from large systems like fighter planes and warships to small arms such as rifles and hand guns. These weapons have a legitimate place in properly regulated military and police arsenals, but also, unfortunately, can be diverted to illegitimate uses, either in the course of being exported or soon after.”

On the prospects for success of the ATT negotiation process, Epps is optimistic but realistic: “The vast majority of states, including Canada, support an Arms Trade Treaty. There are, however, a number of influential states that are skeptics. Civil society groups across the globe must be prepared to counter arguments against a comprehensive treaty. Helping to focus the wide public support that exists for an ATT will play an important part in the success of ATT negotiations.”

The UK funds will support training for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and will allow them to participate directly in activities at the UN in New York and at ATT-related meetings of states in the Middle East (July 2009) and in Southeast Asia (September 2009) sponsored by the European Union. Support will also be available for civil society efforts in India.

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Members of the ATT Steering Committee are:

Africa Peace Forum (Kenya)	Amnesty International
Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress (Costa Rica)	Caritas Internationalis
Asociación para Políticas Públicas (Argentina)	Oxfam
Friends Committee on National Legislation (USA)	Saferworld (UK)
International Action Network on Small Arms	Sou da Paz (Brazil)
Non-Violence International (Thailand)	Viva Rio (Brazil)
Schweitzer Institute (USA)	Project Ploughshares
Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (Sweden)	
Women’s Institute for Alternative Development (Trinidad and Tobago)	

Summary of Principles for Authorizing Transfers

The key principles that should be incorporated into the text of an ATT as the standards for determining the legality of an international transfer of arms and ammunition are:

States should ensure that no transfers of arms or ammunition are authorized:

- If UN Charter obligations would be violated, including: the prohibition on the threat or use of force (Article 2(4)), the prohibition on the intervention in the internal affairs of another State (Article 2(7)), the promotion of human rights and promoting conditions of economic and social progress (Articles 1 and 55), Security Council Chapter VII arms embargoes;
- If there is a *substantial* risk that the *specific* transfer under review will be used to facilitate *serious* violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law; to facilitate terrorist attacks; perpetuate a pattern of violent crime; for the commission of organized crime; to adversely affect regional security or stability; to seriously impair poverty reduction or socio-economic objectives; to facilitate corrupt practices.