

Report from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (UK) to the meeting of the European Network Against Arms Trade - September 2002

Shelling Out - how taxpayers subsidise the arms trade

CAAT's main campaign in 2002 is on arms export subsidies. An information and campaign pack has been produced and widely distributed. Supporters are asked to raise the issue with their MPs and to press for a parliamentary investigation of the subsidy. Postcards are also being sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Lots of people around the country are taking part in this campaign and the numbers of active local groups and contacts is increasing.

New export control legislation

The new Export Bill became law in July. It will not come into operation until the middle of 2003. In the meantime, the Government will be consulting on the secondary (or detailed) legislation. The main issue is likely to be brokerage as the Government seems reluctant to introduce full extra-territorial controls on the activities of arms brokers.

Changes to regulations

On 8th July Foreign Secretary Jack Straw suddenly announced new "factors" to be considered when assessing export licence applications. Where components are to be exported the UK government will look at the UK's military industrial relationship with the country where the equipment will be finally assembled. He justified the changes by saying: "The Government has judged that the UK's security and defence relationship with the US is fundamental to the UK's national security ... Defence collaboration with the US is also key to maintaining a strong defence industrial capacity."

Jack Straw also announced that he was allowing the export of components for F-16 fighters being made by the US company Lockheed Martin and sold to Israel. F-16s have been used against Palestinian civilians. He said: "Any interruption to the supply of these components would have serious implications for the UK's defence relations with the United States." In other words, it would jeopardise the interests of manufacturer BAE Systems and its need to remain part of the Lockheed Martin team building the Joint Strike Fighter.

CAAT, as well as the Committee of MPs which looks at arms exports, is very concerned about this change.

Mercenary consultation

The UK Foreign Office is consulting about possible changes in the law regarding mercenaries, or Private Military Companies as they prefer to know them. CAAT has made a submission on this. Unfortunately, most of the others who have done so run PMCs and are trying to prove that they are respectable outfits fulfilling a humanitarian mission.

Export Credits

CAAT continues to be involved in the UK group of organisations (most environmental, some development) which is campaigning around the work of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Ann attended a meeting of the international ECA Watch (Export Credit Agency) in Berlin in February. She was the only arms trade person there and since then has been asked to provide arms trade information for the ECA Watch website and a proposed European Union campaign. It would be really good if people from anti-arms campaign in more countries could become involved in ECA work on arms exports.

Clean Investment Campaign

In February CAAT produced its annual figures showing investments by public bodies in arms companies. As well as attracting press coverage, it helped many individuals contact local councils and the like to challenge their investment policy.

Eurosatory and Farnborough

Two mini-bus loads of CAAT supporters joined French-organised protests at the Eurosatory arms exhibition. A protest was organised at the Farnborough Airshow and Christians handed in a protest to Tony Blair at that time.

Christian work

CAAT has been working with Pax Christi to raise arms trade issues in churches in the UK and with leading church figures. The new head of the Church of England, Rowan Williams, is among those who have signed up.

Press coverage

CAAT has received a lot of press coverage recently and its opinions sought on many arms trade related issues including arms sales to India and the licensing of air traffic control equipment to Tanzania. The latter had been opposed by the International Development Minister, Clare Short.

CAAT News

CAAT News, now a magazine rather than a newsletter, is attractive to look at and full of articles on arms trade issues written by CAAT staff, academics and politicians as well as others with views on the issue.

New briefings

CAAT has just published a new briefing on the employment implications region-by-region of ending UK arms exports. A briefing on Israel "Arming the Occupation" is expected to be published in October. All CAAT's briefings are on its website.

Former CAAT staff member Gideon Burrows has just finished a book on the arms trade for a "No Nonsense guide to ..." series. This will be launched in November.

CAAT internal

The number of people receiving the CAAT newsletter has continued to grow, and the campaign feels more lively and productive than ever before.

CAAT now has seven staff. They are:

Richard Bingley - press work and newsletter (full-time); Chris Cole - looks after local campaigners around the country and the Christian Network (4 days a week); Patrick Delaney - sales worker (3 days a week); Ann Feltham - parliamentary and lobbying work, liaison with other organisations in the UK and internationally, administration (full-time); Martin Hogbin - national events co-ordinator who also deals with the Student Network (3 days a week); Joanna Lamprell - fundraiser (full-time); Ian Prichard - research co-ordinator (full-time).

As well as very many volunteers, the CAAT office also had the services of Jim Footner until June. He was an intern, paid for by the Quakers.