

Report from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (UK) to the meeting of the European Network Against Arms Trade - April 2007

Saudi Arabia

The biggest arms trade story in the UK during the last year, a possibly the biggest ever, has been the ending by the Government of the Serious Fraud Office inquiry into the BAE Systems' Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia. The decision came in December after a lot of pressure from BAE about the possible loss of a new contract for 72 Eurofighters.

There was huge press and parliamentary interest and CAAT joined with the Corner House, a social justice organisation, to mount a legal challenge of the decision. This has now started, but is likely to last some months, and possibly longer.

Now CAAT has launched a public "Control BAE: reopen the Saudi corruption inquiry" campaign. This aims to highlight the way BAE tells the Government what to do, rather than the other way round. The first actions will be at the BAE AGM on 9th May.

In October 2006, a CAAT researcher found a file of documents from the mid-1980's in the National Archive. These made it clear that the Bank of England, the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the Treasury (or finance ministry) were all worried about the financing of the Al Yamamah deals. CAAT also has a number of Freedom of Information requests in the system regarding Saudi Arabia, asking both for historical documents and for information about export credits and the new Al Yamamah deal.

Shut DESO

Until the end of March 2007, CAAT's main campaign was to close the Defence Export Services Organisation, part of the Ministry of Defence which promotes military equipment sales overseas. As well as CAAT supporters going to see their own MPs, there was a Day of Action on 16th October when the DESO headquarters building in London was surrounded by protesters.

Behind the scenes, CAAT is trying to persuade the Treasury to stop funding DESO, pointing out that this is a taxpayer subsidy for private companies.

Israel

During the war in the Lebanon, CAAT linked up with the development organisation, War on Want, and with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to call for an embargo on the sale of military equipment destined for Israel. Although the amount of equipment going directly from the UK is quite small, a lot of components are sold to US companies for incorporation in equipment bound for Israel.

This was a popular campaign at that time, but it was hard to get parliamentary support - there was a great reluctance to criticise Israel. The groups are now keeping campaign materials available, but not giving much staff time to the campaign.

DSEi

The DSEi arms fair is taking place in London again in September 2007. It, as well as other arms fairs, is organised for the Ministry of Defence by Reed Elsevier, based in the UK and the Netherlands.

A lot of CAAT's work has been around Reed and there have been many actions which have gained publicity. Several medical organisations have now expressed their dismay that a publisher of medical journals is involved in the arms trade; also, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust has sold its shares in Reed.

Clean Investment Campaign

Once again, CAAT's annual release of the figures regarding local government investment in the arms trade has attracted a lot of media attention. This latest several months, as local newspapers and radio programmes became aware of the figures.

Mercenaries / PMSCs

CAAT, together with development charity War on Want and Amnesty International UK, is trying to raise the need for legislation to control the activities of the growing number of private military and security companies. At the moment we are not suggesting any specific legislation, just saying that this industry needs to be under the control of governments and not making up its own rules.

Supporters

CAAT is continuing to increase its number of supporters - there are now over 15,000 people on our database with over 5,000 receiving *CAATnews* every two months. Others receive the on-line email bulletin which goes out every month.

Staffing

The CAAT staff are now:

Kathryn Busby - fundraiser (full-time);

Beccie D'Cunha - local campaigns (3 days a week);

Patrick Delaney - sales worker (3 days a week);

Ann Feltham - parliamentary lobbying work, liaison internationally, administration (full-time);

Symon Hill - press officer (3 days a week)

Anna Jones - actions and events (3 days a week)

Ian Prichard - research co-ordinator (full-time);

Kathryn and Patrick are leaving very soon and new people will be recruited.