

Report from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (UK) to the meeting of the European Network Against Arms Trade - June 2008

Saudi Arabia

The High Court hearing regarding the UK government's decision to stop the Serious Fraud Office inquiry into BAE Systems' Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia took place on 14th and 15th February; the judgment in our favour was given on 10th April; and on 24th April the judges ruled that the decision to close the investigation was unlawful. The Government has appealed and the appeal will be heard in the House of Lords on 7th and 8th July. The judges also said that costs, both those already incurred and those around the appeal, should be met from public funds.

Comedy event

To raise money for the legal action, the comedian Mark Thomas persuaded a lot of other comedians to take part in an evening of entertainment in September. Over 3,000 people attended.

Saudi royal visit

The Queen invited the Saudi royal family visit to a state visit to the UK and CAAT protesters were present for the ceremonial procession to Buckingham Palace on 30th October. The protest went really well and received lots of media coverage.

Our aim – to shock and embarrass the Saudi royals – was achieved. The Financial Times report on the visit said: 'the Saudis were, in the words of one former British diplomat, "under considerable shock" as they faced the most intense wave of disapproval received by the king on a foreign visit in recent years.'

Speaking tour

In November there was a speaking tour - a series of public meetings about the legal challenge and close relationship between BAE and the UK government. It visited nine UK cities and each meeting was attended by 30-50 people (many of whom were new to CAAT, for e.g. they had come from other local organisations or groups), and some of the meetings obtained local media coverage.

Information Tribunal

In another Court hearing, CAAT asked for documents about UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia under the UK's new Freedom of Information laws. At the hearing in March, the Government called the UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia as a witness. The results of this request are awaited.

The Government backed down on another appeal to the Information Tribunal. In December, the Export Credits Guarantee Department suddenly provided the information asked for in March 2005 - the then exposure of the UK taxpayer to the Al Yamamah deal. It was £750million.

BAE trying to be ethical

BAE appointed a former Lord Chief Justice to look at the companies ethics. CAAT made a submission to this Woolf Committee, pointing out that we had problems with BAE's purpose and activities generally, but, given the remit of the Committee, drew its attention to its behaviour regarding anti-bribery regulations and with its spying activities. CAAT staff also met with Lord Woolf to discuss this.

Shut DESO

In July 2007, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, announced that the Government's arms sales unit, the Defence Export Services Organisation, was to close. "Shut DESO" had been a major CAAT campaign, pointing out to the Treasury that DESO represented a taxpayer subsidy for private companies.

On 1st April 2008, responsibility for military export promotion moved to UK Trade & Investment, the body that promotes all UK exports. Military sales no longer have their privileged position. CAAT is, however, continuing to monitor the situation and may campaign to ensure that the arms companies do not build a stronghold in another part of Government.

DSEi

The DSEi arms fair took place in London in September 2007. CAAT supported a multi-faith vigil on the eve of the fair and our public demonstration on the opening day went really well.

DSEi, as well as other arms fairs, was organised for the Ministry of Defence by Reed Elsevier, based in the UK and the Netherlands. On 1st June 2007 Reed Elsevier had announced it would be selling the arms fairs. The sale, to exhibition company Clarion, was completed in May 2008. CAAT is currently discussing how to campaign against Clarion.

Clean Investment Campaign

The most striking news was that campaigners in Liverpool had managed to get three of the local councils to vote in favour of disinvestment from arms companies, but Merseyside Pension Fund they are part of, and which is dominated by another of the local councils, refused to take action.

Mercenaries / PMSCs

CAAT, is still working with the 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.

Reports

- * Tim Webb's Goodwin Paper '**Bribing for Britain**' was published in October.
- * Tim Street and Martha Beale's '**Study War No More**' report into military research in universities was launched in November. The launch was covered in the Guardian.
- * Anna Stavrianakis' Goodwin Paper '**The Façade of Arms Control**' on the arms export licensing system was published in February.
- * Stephen Schofield's jobs and alternatives report, '**Making arms, wasting skills**', was published in June. All are available on CAAT's website.