

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE NEW ARMS TRADE TREATY

By Carlos Villán Durán, President of the Spanish Society for International Human Rights Law (SSIHRL).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted on 2 April 2013 draft resolution L.58 containing in its Annex the new Arms Trade Treaty. 154 States voted in favor (among them Spain and the United States), against three (North Korea, Iran and Syria) and 23 abstentions (among others: Belarus, Bolivia, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Russian Federation and Venezuela). The treaty will be open to signature and ratification on 3 June 2013 in New York and will come into force once it receives 50 ratifications, which is estimated to take two more years.

This is an initiative taken ten years ago and conducted by a wide coalition of 1,000 civil society organizations, supported by Costa Rica and other States. The most outstanding point is that the treaty prohibits the States Parties selling conventional weapons, including small and light weapons, to other States in which are serious risk of being used to commit genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Out of that hypothesis, the treaty legitimizes the international arms trade among States.

The macabre business of arms can move 100.000 million dollars a year. The new treaty is a first step to disarmament, because it will stop transfers of arms fueling the worst atrocities and abuses. But is not enough because it does not prohibit comprehensively the ammunition's trade, neither the weapon's sale to non-State entities. Besides, monitoring the treaty implementation is left to the discretionality of the Conference of States Parties.

The right to a general and complete disarmament under United Nations supervision is an essential component of the emergent human right to peace, also claimed by the civil society and some States, with the aim that the General Assembly will adopt by the end of 2014 the Universal Declaration of the Human Right to Peace. Not only trade, but also arms production should be ruled by disarmament. In accordance with the draft declaration under negotiation at the United Nations Human Rights Council, States should reduce the military expenditure to the minimum level necessary to guarantee human security. They should also eliminate weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological ones. Finally, the resources released by disarmament should be devoted to economic and social development of peoples and the fair redistribution of natural resources.