



## Surely it's time to stop arms trading.

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11 September, 2001. A date many of us will remember, the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington - and the beginning of the 'war on terror'. I remember it for another reason that is not unconnected. It was the first year that the Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair was held at the ExCel centre in London. Each situated within high-rise city environments. Each a manifestation of the violence that human beings can inflict on one another. Sixteen years on to the day and the DESI arms fair will again be open for business.

Most people have no idea that this biennial fair takes place in the heart of London. They are rightly shocked to discover that it is the world's largest arms fair, hosting around 34,000 attendees from the USA, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and more. The 1,600 exhibitors include all of the big names in weapons production, among them BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin and Rolls Royce. DESI has the blessing, and co-sponsorship, of the British Government. Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Defence Procurement calls it a "landmark event, a showcase, a stage for diplomacy, a platform for international engagement". This makes it sound like a gathering of international aid workers!

Rather, it is a market place for weapons-producing companies to trumpet their 'battle-field tested' tanks, aircraft, drones, guns and munitions, feeding the addictions of what Pope Francis calls a "never-ending race to create and spread ever more sophisticated weaponry."

We live in a time of great insecurity, from the Korean Peninsula to the Middle East, Syria and Yemen brought about by political instability and the consequences of conflict and climate change. Surely this a time to disarm, to talk, negotiate, rebuild trust to build-up what has been destroyed and protect our fragile ecosystems. However, a headline in the journal Defence News offers a reveals a different story: "A return to prosperity? Defence revenues climb for the first time in 5 years".

Earlier this year the Campaign Against Arms Trade took the British Government to court. They argued that it was illegal to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia because of its leading role in the military coalition that causing havoc in Yemen. Sadly, the judgement was in favour of the Government. CAAT however are appealing the decision and this important moral and legal issue will be argued again. Pax Christi too has been engaging critically with Government about its arms trade and military links with Saudi Arabia and the war in Yemen.

Whether or not the legal argument is won, there is a clear moral argument against trading in weapons. In the 1980s Cardinal Hume likened the arms trade to the drug trade, taking to task those who said, "If we don't supply them, someone else will". No one should be in the business of trading arms. More recently Pope Francis has used more powerful words to condemn the trade, "We plead for peace for this world dominated by arms-dealers, who profit from the blood of men and women". Last month, responding to young people's questions about the problems of the world, he spoke of the arms trade as a highly profitable "industry of death" driven by greed.

The arms trade is not a benign trade. The 'goods' traded destroy, maim and fuel conflicts that cause the breakdown of communities and create deep grievance. For this reason members of Pax Christi and others will take part in activities to expose this face of the arms trade. We will organise times of prayer, lamenting and repenting the global arms industry. On 11 September,

the eve DSEI, several hundred people will gather for an hour-long silent vigil to say NO to this arms fair and also to remember those who died in the US on 11 September 2001 and the thousands who have been killed since then in the flawed and on-going 'war on terror'. Join us in prayer wherever you are at that time.

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