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Civil Society Organizations Decry Global Affairs Canada Justifications for Resumption of Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia

Today, in an Open Letter addressed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a coalition of Canadian civil society organizations expressed deep concern regarding the analysis contained in the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) document [*Final Report: Review of export permits to Saudi Arabia*](#). The government document was published in April following the announcement that the moratorium on approving new permits for military exports to Saudi Arabia would be lifted.

In the view of the civil society coalition, the government's analysis is unsatisfactory and demonstrates a weak commitment to Canada's obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). They also expressed concern that the Final Report contains an insufficiently robust analysis with regards to the undermining of peace and security, international humanitarian and international human rights law, gender-based violence, the "substantial risk" test and diversion.

As part of its commitments under the ATT, Canada is required to assess weapons exports in order to determine if there is a risk that they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) or international human rights law, and is prohibited from exporting where there is a "substantial risk" that such exports would undermine peace and security.

In the report, the government clarifies its operating definition of what constitutes a "substantial risk". Unfortunately, the government analysis seeks evidence of repetitive misuse of exported weapons, rather than evidence of risk of misuse. *"This approach, which waits for violations to take place before they are considered as part of the risk analysis, undermines the ATT's purpose of reducing human suffering through prevention,"* said Cesar Jaramillo, Executive Director of Project Ploughshares.

Despite a substantial record affirming that Saudi Arabia has committed serious violations of IHL in Yemen, and its abysmal human rights record domestically, GAC has concluded that the types of weapons that Canada exports are not cause for concern. Justin Mohammed, Human Rights Law and Policy Campaigner at Amnesty International Canada, said: *"It seems that the Government of Canada will not be satisfied that a substantial risk exists until there is proof that Canadian-made Light Armoured Vehicles or sniper rifles are directly and repeatedly used in the commission of international human rights or international humanitarian law violations. Canada is taking a narrow, cynical approach that is inconsistent with the ATT's purpose."*

Another troubling affirmation of the Final Report is that it “found no credible evidence linking Canadian-made military goods or technology to gender-based violence by KSA personnel in relation to the conflict in Yemen and no evidence of repeated use of such equipment for such acts”. Anne Duhamel, Director of Policy and Campaigns at Oxfam Quebec comments: *“It is troubling to note that the government ignored documented evidence of armoured vehicles used to attack a maternity hospital in Hodeidah in a conflict where rape and other GBV are rife. Yet GAC made no apparent effort in the Report to determine the risk of Saudi forces engaging in similar acts.”*

She added, *“If Canada wants to be consistent with its forthcoming Feminist Foreign Aid Policy and its Feminist Foreign Policy, it must ensure that GBV is systematically and thoroughly considered in its arms export assessments.”*

The report states that “overall, Canadian exports of military goods and technology to [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] contribute to regional peace and security”. Rideau Institute President Peggy Mason commented: *“This astounding conclusion stands in direct contradiction to the findings of the [August - September 2019 UN Eminent Expert Report on Yemen](#) that ‘the continued supply of weapons to parties involved in Yemen perpetuates the conflict and the suffering of the population.’ The observation of the UN Expert Group is a statement of the blindingly obvious to anyone even cursorily following the horrific Yemeni conflict. It also makes absolutely clear that all military exports to all parties to the conflict are the problem, not some exports to some parties.”*

Mason added *“The government of Canada cannot have it both ways – signing up countries in support of the UN Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire during the pandemic, while at the same time impeding that goal by continuing to arm one side of the deadly Yemeni conflict.”*

The signatories to the Open Letter are: Amnesty International Canada (English branch), Amnistie internationale Canada francophone, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam-Québec, Project Ploughshares, and the Rideau Institute.

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