

Manukau Courier

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MPs take action

As Manukau East's MP I was thinking locally but acting globally in my capacity as president of Parliamentarians for Global Action when I led a delegation of MPs from around the world to New York's United Nations in July.

There, 193 member states, including New Zealand, met to negotiate an arms trade treaty.

The treaty's main objective is to ensure that conventional weapons are not exported to countries or governments that have a poor or questionable human rights track record. The recent human rights abuses and crimes against humanity in Syria is a case in point.

The consensus rule that operated at the ATT conference means that if a single country objects to the text, it cannot be approved. The bad news from the conference was that one country did object and so regrettably no agreement could be reached at that time.

The good news now is that it seems very likely that a final ATT diplomatic conference will take place in March 2013 and a draft resolution is now before the First Committee (Disarmament) of the UN General Assembly which, if approved, will put this in place.

There is an informal push by some countries to ensure that this draft resolution results in a conference that is still governed by the consensus rule but if this is not achievable, it reverts to the usual UN General Assembly rules of procedure

allowing for a two-thirds majority of member states present and voting.

It is unclear if this effort to amend the draft resolution will be successful and this will only become apparent in the coming weeks.

However, it is a clear sign that many UN member states are determined to conclude an arms trade treaty before the end of 2013.

Parliamentarians for Global Action has played a decisive role in promoting the Control Arms Global Parliamentary Declaration on the Arms Trade Treaty, which saw 2097 MPs from 113 countries support the resolution.

I know that securing agreement on a sound treaty won't be easy. But I do believe it can be achieved if responsible leaders from key countries work together in the weeks ahead.

More than 50,000 people worldwide lost their lives to armed violence over the course of the ATT conference in July. What greater motivation do we need to act quickly and decisively to make this treaty a reality?

As I sit in the Speaker's chair in Parliament and observe the plaques of remembrance marking the lives lost by New Zealanders, I am determined that our country should be at the forefront in the promotion of an arms trade treaty.

ROSS ROBERTSON
Manukau East MP