



April 25, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
Email: justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca; pm@pm.gc.ca

Re: Open Letter to the Prime Minister on Saudi arms deal authorization

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

We, the undersigned, wish to express our profound concerns about the issuance of export permits for Canada's multi-billion dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia, despite the flagrant incompatibilities of this contract with the human rights safeguards of our export controls.

To provide such a large supply of lethal weapons to a regime with such an appalling record of human rights abuses is immoral and unethical. The spirit and letter of both domestic export controls and international law support this view. The government has had every opportunity to uphold this position, but has chosen not to. We therefore ask the government to rescind the export permits, ensuring that this deal does not go ahead unless and until relevant human rights concerns have been resolved.

The effectiveness of Canada's export control regime is contingent upon its ability to produce objective, reliable assessments related to export permit applications. We believe the regime's integrity has been utterly compromised with the government's decision to proceed with the largest arms sale in Canadian history to one of the world's worst human rights violators.

The \$15-billion contract with Saudi Arabia is precisely the type of deal that Canada's export controls are intended to prevent. The Government of Canada must enforce our existing export control policy and regulations, which should prohibit arms sales to governments that have a "persistent record of serious violations of the human rights of their citizens," and that are "involved in or under imminent threat of hostilities." That process should be transparent and must prevail over other economic or strategic considerations.



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The Minister of Foreign Affairs has stated that Canada “has no evidence” that Saudi Arabia has used Canadian-made goods against civilians. However, the threshold established by Canadian export controls to assess the possibility of misuse is neither “evidence” nor “certainty” but “reasonable risk.” Given what is known about Saudi Arabia’s abysmal—and worsening—human rights record, both within Saudi Arabia and in neighbouring Yemen, we consider this risk to be evident, and categorically express our deep reservations about the strength of an export control system that has apparently determined otherwise.

We recognize the prospective economic benefits that a contract of this magnitude would entail and that there are many commercial, security and strategic dimensions to Canada’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. But these are not meant to be, and should not be, considerations when the application of Canada’s export control guidelines indicates a finding of “reasonable risk” of continuing violation of international humanitarian and human rights obligations by the Saudi government. Long notorious for the systematic violation of rights of Saudi civilians, Saudi Arabia has now been accused by a UN panel of experts of ‘crimes against humanity’ as a result of the “widespread and systematic” targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in neighbouring Yemen.

We urge you to consider seriously whether our export controls have served their intended purpose with the authorization of this deal. We believe they have not. Our export control system must ensure that export authorizations are granted for only end-users that are in full compliance with applicable safeguards, and this cannot in any way reasonably be the case with Saudi Arabia.

Your government’s authorization of this deal also casts serious doubt over Canada’s readiness to abide by the legally binding obligations and intent of the Arms Trade Treaty, which Canada has announced it will join in the near future. Having said this, it is our hope that ATT ratification will constitute an occasion to improve the legal and political machinery for regulating Canadian arms exports, and we stand ready to contribute to any and all efforts in this regard. That must include much greater transparency as to the criteria and process that are used to assess the human rights implications of any proposed arms deal.

Of this we are convinced, Prime Minister: the decision to proceed with this arms deal undermines not only the public’s trust in our export control system, but also the core values that define Canada’s character as a nation.

With respect and good wishes,

Peace. Justice. Survival.
Paix. Justice. Survie.



Roy Culpeper, Chair: Group of 78



Fergus Watt, Executive Director: World Federalist Movement Canada



Cesar Jaramillo, Executive Director: Project Ploughshares



Pierre Jasmin, Artists for Peace: Vice President

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Peggy Mason, President: Rideau Institute



Béatrice Vaugrante, Directrice Générale: Amnistie internationale Canada francophone



Alex Neve, Secretary General: Amnesty International Canada English

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Julia Sanchez, President-CEO: Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC)



Monia Mazigh, National Coordinator: International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group



Thomas Woodley, President: Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East



Metta Spencer, President: Science for Peace

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Professor John Packer, Director, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa
Directeur, centre de recherche et d'enseignement sur les droits de la personne, Université d'Ottawa

Ligue des **droits et libertés** 50
50 ans d'action (DL)

Nicole Filion, Coördiatrice: Ligue des droits et libertés

cc. The Hon. Stephane Dion
The Hon. Chrystia Freeland
The Hon. Harjit Sajjan
The Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau