“Arms deals are a major threat to security, peace and human rights” – UN Independent Expert

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The UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas, today called on States to stop exporting weapons to countries when there is a risk these will be used to commit gross human rights violations.

“Another International Day of Peace has passed as an opportunity to reaffirm that arms deals are a major threat to security, peace and human rights around the world,” the human rights expert said.

“States should abstain from sending arms to countries when they know those weapons will further endanger peace and security and entail war crimes,” Mr. de Zayas stressed. “Military aid cannot be granted to countries that engage in activities that the international community, the International Court of Justice or the Human Rights Council have found to contravene international law and human rights treaties.”

Instead, the Independent Expert called on States “to work collaboratively on resolving the root causes of local, regional and international conflict, often emerging from the unrepresentative nature of governments, great injustices and inequalities prevailing in the world, the race for natural resources and the asymmetries of trade relations.”

“In this context, as in every other where foreign military assistance and bilateral military aid amounting to billions of dollars are provided to occupying States such as Israel, to States where there is an ongoing conflict, from  Syria to South Sudan and Yemen, the respect of human rights treaty obligations is at great risk,” he added.

Furthermore, the Independent Expert expressed serious concern at the continuing support by some States with a weapon industry capacity to numerous non-state actors resorting to indiscriminate violence and killings of civilians such as Boko Haram and ISIS. “These types of deals contravene international law and entail State responsibility and an obligation to make reparation to victims,” Mr. de Zayas said.

Recalling his previous reports to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly the expert emphasized that the recent entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty constitutes a great achievement.

“I wholeheartedly encourage every State to ratify and implement this treaty,” he said.  “Sustainable peace, however, requires that States not only regulate the arms trade – but significantly reduce it, and engage in good faith disarmament negotiations as required by article 6 of the Non Proliferation Treaty.”