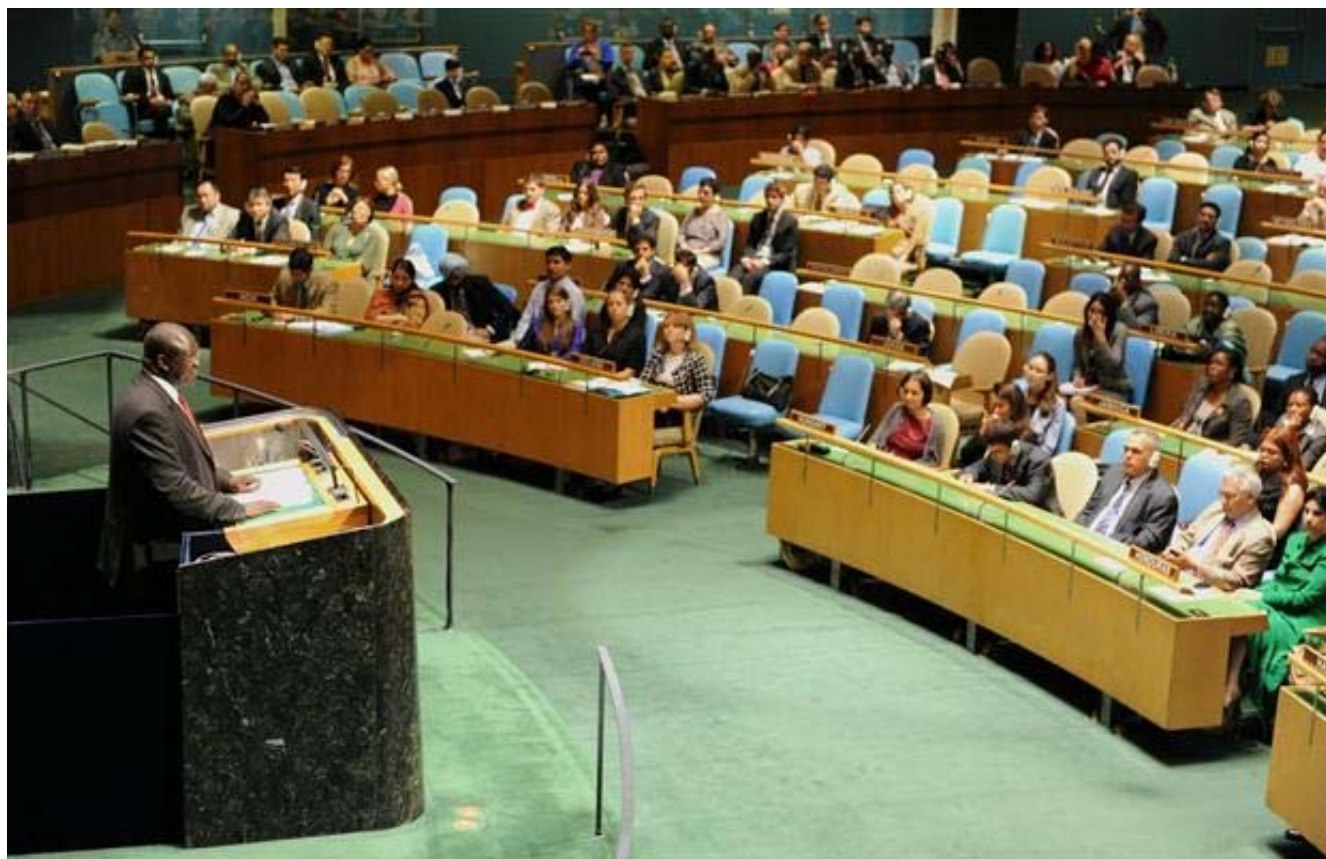


Gun control groups slam Canada's stance at UN arms talks

BY JEFF DAVIS, POSTMEDIA NEWS JULY 14, 2011



Canada has thrown a wrench into negotiations toward a United Nations arms trade treaty by proposing hunting rifles be exempted from the draft accord, gun control groups say.

Photograph by: Stan Honda, Getty Images

Canada has thrown a wrench into negotiations toward a United Nations arms trade treaty by proposing hunting rifles be exempted from the draft accord, gun control groups say.

But firearms advocates are praising the move, calling it evidence that the Harper government is on their side when it comes to gun control.

Preliminary talks on a future Arms Trade Treaty are being held this week at the United Nations in New York. The treaty would establish common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms, and likely establish a reporting framework as well.

Thursday Canadian diplomats proposed that hunting rifles and other sporting arms be omitted from the draft accord.

"Canada would like to see language in the 'Principles' section that explicitly recognizes that

there is a legal trade in small arms for legitimate civilian uses, including for sporting, hunting and collecting purposes," read the speech.

Canada proposed the following clause be added into the draft accord: "Reaffirming that small arms have certain legitimate civilian uses, including sporting, hunting and collecting purposes."

Canada also proposed that ammunition and other "high volume items" be exempted from reporting requirements.

Kenneth Epps, of Canadian arms control NGO Project Ploughshares, said Canada's move is hampering efforts to forge a comprehensive global arms control regime.

"The problem is that once you introduce exemptions, others will do the same," he said. "It's the thin edge of the wedge."

Epps called Canada's proposal a major departure from previous positions. He said there is very little difference between a sniper rifle and a hunting rifle, and that both are dangerous in the wrong hands.

"If the weapons are being used to kill civilians, or for criminal activity, it doesn't matter whether it's a sports rifle or a military rifle," he said. "From a humanitarian perspective, all firearms need to be controlled, and that's the bottom line."

Epps said a representative of the Canadian Sports Shooting Association — a major gun owners' group — attended the meeting alongside Canadian officials Thursday.

"The statement is reflective, in my view, of government pandering to domestic gun owners," he said.

Representatives of the Canadian Sports Shooting Association were not immediately available for comment.

Solomon Friedman, an Ottawa-based lawyer specializing in firearms law, said his fellow firearms owners should be pleased with the government's push to protect their rights on the world stage.

"Gun owners will certainly be happy they are not being penalized for the actions of gun traffickers and rogue states, and that they're not being lumped in," he said.

Friedman said gun owners are pleased with the Harper government's position on guns, particularly its plan to repeal the long-gun registry.

"What we're seeing here is a shift in attitude by Canada's government to recognize the legitimate use of firearms by millions of Canadians," he said. "The government of Canada no longer seems to be treating law abiding firearms owners as presumptive criminals."

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