

Arms Trade Treaty Campaign Evaluation: Amnesty International UK

*Summary Report
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This evaluation assesses the most recent period – from May 2011 to date – of campaigning for an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by Amnesty International UK (AIUK). The evaluation puts a particular focus on the appropriateness and effectiveness of political influencing strategies within the UK. It reviews the Section's planning and coordination infrastructure and assesses how well this has served to underwrite effective integration of different functions, joint working and interaction with the International Secretariat.

Headlines

HEADLINES

Overall the campaign was high-calibre, made excellent use of strategic collaboration across civil society, political parties and government, and - building on the strong foundations of previous campaigning work - led to excellent outcomes.

OUTCOMES

Final Treaty was strong, surpassing many expectations.

UK Government adopted - and was held to - a strong position.

AIUK played a leading role in the campaign, making a significant contribution.

STRATEGY

Collaborative engagement with government paid off, especially in tandem with others' more critical approach.

Effective work with MPs and key Ministers.

Focus on 'quality not quantity' of activism was right, and could perhaps have been more strictly upheld.

MANAGEMENT

Excellent internal coordination, high levels of functional integration.

Strong institutional support to the campaign.

Effectiveness hampered by tensions with the IS that were not resolved.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that the elements that made this campaign so effective – in terms of both strategy and management - are transferred to the future campaigning programme
2. Consider the implications for future working arrangements with the IS, on arms issues and more generally
3. Continue to play a watchdog role as ATT is ratified and implemented

Methodology

The evaluation draws upon three main inputs:

1. a review of documentation, including campaign plans, minutes of Project Group meetings, internal reviews, public statements and blog pieces;
2. a workshop attended by Amnesty International UK [AIUK] staff and volunteers;
3. semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with AIUK staff and activists, allies, representatives of Government and Members of Parliament according to the following totals:

AI UK		NGOs and other activists	UK Government	Parliamentarians
Staff	Volunteer activists			
7	3	4	2	3

Input from Amnesty's International Secretariat was requested, but no representative was available.

Findings and analysis

Outcomes

The final Treaty – though not perfect – is widely considered to be a much better result than generally expected, especially in comparison to prospects at the July 2012 UN Conference.

The UK Government adopted – and was held to – a strong position, and encouraged others to do likewise. Behind the solid position of the Government lies a momentum in support of the Treaty built up across two administrations and within Parliament.

The Labour Party's supportive stance was maintained through its move into opposition while AIUK made good connections with the Liberal Democrats who held a strong policy line within the Coalition. Conservatives seem to have adopted their policy line in spite of low levels of interest and support from rank-and-file MPs. AIUK and others provided an important counter-weight, keeping Government Ministers on track.

AIUK was a key part of – and played a leading role in – the coalition that ensured the UK remained a champion. AIUK and its allies effectively exploited a favourable situation, with AIUK's added value being its content expertise, tactical nous and reputation in Government circles.

Internal outcomes

The successful result, and AIUK's part in it, is something that should help motivate current supporters, as well as attracting potential new supporters. It is a flagship example for the whole sector of the exponential results that can be achieved through strategic advocacy and campaigning.

Through the campaign, AIUK was able to enhance its own capacity: the priority given to the campaign allowed for investment in systems and structures for constituency lobbying that other campaigns can now benefit from.

Strategy

The campaign has operated to a consistent strategy, building upon longer-term campaigning that had successfully created a favourable context. It mobilised cross-party support, pre-empting and managing potential opposition from the UK arms industry and utilising a legacy of interest and knowledge among staff and activists.

The ability to connect politicians to the grassroots and to maintain cross-party engagement were key to the strength of the position taken by the UK Government.

AIUK deployed targeted, 'high quality' activism alongside professional lobbying, with relatively limited use of wider supporter and public mobilisation, which represented the right choice, given the issue and the position of the government.

Campaigners had a constructive and collaborative approach towards the UK Government and was more trusting of government strategy than other NGO colleagues. AIUK correctly recognised that this was an issue on which it could employ a cooperative relationship with Government to good effect.

AIUK'S own strategy, whilst based on principles of collaboration, included an implicit threat of more critical public campaigning if the government were to retreat from the positive positions that it was taking. In this way the campaign relied on and benefited from targets' 'fear' of AIUK's potential capacity to mobilise broad support and to adopt a more critical tone. It could do so because its clout and reputation mean that officials and politicians can take it neither lightly nor for granted. In this way, more collaborative campaigns benefit from the legacy created by more public and more critical campaigning in the past.

AIUK's more insider approach was also complemented by other groups' willingness to be more critical. The combined effect of different civil society groups bore fruit. If for AIUK there was a risk to putting its eggs into a single 'insider strategy' basket, this risk was mitigated by some of the eggs of allies being in other baskets.

AIUK, to some degree, felt that it needed to deploy popular messages and mobilise more widely in part because it wanted to be able to switch on public anger if needed. Some efforts in this direction – for example some media work – may not have been necessary to the goal of keeping the UK government on track. However, it is difficult to perfect the overall balance without hindsight and it is arguably better to over-invest than invest too little. A fuller judgement on the right balance would also depend on an assessment of the opportunity costs to other campaigns.

Overall, AIUK was successful in avoiding a 'formulaic' approach to the ATT campaign as a priority campaign. Those running the campaign strove to ensure that the political influencing strategy drove action rather than defaulting to the use of all available tactical options. There are trade-offs in terms of organisational needs and drivers that arise in any supporter-facing organisation - for example in relation to the need to maintain supporter engagement through actions - and there is a risk that a priority campaign shoehorns these into a template. However, in this case these trade-offs and were well navigated through effective campaign coordination.

AIUK judged correctly that a relatively light-touch engagement strategy with the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills was needed, although the role of the latter in Treaty implementation may need to be addressed.

Campaign management

AIUK has well-established mechanisms of planning, coordination and management which it is adept at tailoring to specific campaigns. In its work on the ATT, AIUK maintained a high standard of functional integration in both planning and delivery.

Areas of key strength include:

- the quality of support provided to activists,
- the management of policy and communication lines between New York and London during UN Conferences, and
- the manner in which various spokespersons and human rights defenders have been employed.

The campaign benefited from excellent internal coordination in AIUK, backed by a high degree of institutional support.

The relationship between AIUK and the IS has been marked by tension which centred on the nature and speed of guidance provided by the IS, the role which Amnesty should play within the Control Arms Campaign and approaches to the UK Government made by the IS.

This tension impacted on staff energy levels and morale and had the potential to impact on campaign effectiveness. In the apparent absence of an obvious solution, difficulties in the relationship with the IS were not adequately confronted, despite some attempts to do so on the part of AIUK's management.

The overlap between the UK and international coalitions meant that AIUK's own alliance-building within the UK was complicated by the presence of the IS. AIUK mediated adroitly between the IS and different coalition partners, minimising any wider exposure of differences among the NGOs. However, it is fortunate that the coalition was not in the end tested by a political turn for the worse as there are doubts as to whether it would have had the resilience to cope.

Recommendations

Campaign strategy

1. There are a number of key replicable elements underpinning the success of the campaign that AIUK should attempt to learn, **capture and transfer** to other campaigns include:
 - The mix of high ambition and long-term persistence, combined with shorter-term agility and the ability to trade on a sense of urgency.
 - Researching and proposing practical, clear and credible policy and political solutions.
 - Working in strategic partnership with allies, adopting complementary positioning.
2. AIUK should ensure it maintains the flexibility to **avoid applying a 'formulaic approach' to priority campaigns**. Being a top priority campaign should not involve deploying all available tactics and mobilising all potential constituencies in pre-set ways. AIUK should strive for maximum flexibility around the use of key supporter-facing mechanisms, and as short-as-possible lead-in times to maximise tactical and strategic agility.
3. Decisions about resourcing should take into account that there are different drivers in large-scale campaigns of this nature, for example around the need to ensure that mechanisms of engagement and communication with supporters build the movement as well as fit the specific logic of the influencing strategy. Managing the **potential trade-offs between campaigning and marketing** requires investment at the campaign management level, underpinned by a sense of common purpose across the teams involved.
4. Learning from the way that **prioritised quality over quantity** and connected the grassroots to the decision-makers, AIUK should seek to achieve the desired greater emphasis in its new structure on mobilisation and marketing through a portfolio approach to the campaigning programme. This should not be at the cost of skewing strategic and tactical choices within campaigns.
5. Across its campaigns and over time, AIUK will need to **ensure that the threat of more public criticism and mobilisation remains credible**, and the best way to do this would be to ensure it is occasionally (and effectively) deployed.

Campaign management

6. This campaign demonstrates again the effectiveness of AIUK's **cross-departmental approach to campaign management**. It will be important that this approach can continue to be applied within AIUK's new campaign structure.

7. The campaign rates highly in terms of **support to activists** to undertake high level actions, and the manner of **engagement with 'survivors' / HRDs**. In these areas, and in the manner in which the Section invested in bringing all involved staff and volunteers to a high, common level of understanding of the issues at stake, it represents an example which other campaigns should draw on.
8. This campaign has benefited from having **in-house issue expertise**, which allowed the Section to better cope with difficulties in the guidance provided by, and the relationship with, the IS. This does not mean that Sections should necessarily always seek comparable expertise on other issues, however. The Movement must ensure that expertise is available for developing and delivering potent campaigns, including by ensuring that the necessary expertise resides in the right places.
9. The campaign points to the need to revisit and be clear about the division of responsibilities in cases where UK and international coalitions overlap, and to have **workable mechanisms for resolving disputes** between AIUK and the IS around strategy and tactics or roles and responsibilities.

Future work on the arms trade and ATT

10. AIUK should consider:
 - **Pressing the UK Government** to encourage and support other states in the process of ratifying the ATT.
 - Forming part of an **Amnesty watchdog** highlighting where states fails to adhere to the correct standards.
 - Helping to assert the **primacy of the human rights** elements to the Treaty in debates about the correct interpretation of the text and in later processes of review and refinement of the Treaty.
 - Keeping a watching brief on the positions adopted by the **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills** as the Treaty moves to an implementation phase, possibly strengthening its channels into the department.