



# **Shut DESO Lobby**

## **September 2006 to March 2007**

Campaign Against Arms Trade is organising a Lobby of MPs asking them to press the UK government to close the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO). The facts speak for themselves:

- DESO's job is to promote arms sales around the world;
- DESO is the arms companies' own marketing unit in the heart of government, funded by the UK taxpayer;
- DESO employs nearly 500 civil servants and costs taxpayers £15 million a year - in proportion to its share of UK exports this is over ten times the budget of the department promoting civil exports;
- DESO has "priority markets" which have recently included countries with poor human rights records, such as Saudi Arabia and Indonesia;
- DESO is deeply undemocratic - it gives arms companies massive influence over government policies.

### **Why lobby your MP?**

The Lobby is part of CAAT's "Shut DESO" campaign. Many people - MPs included - do not know about DESO. By visiting your MP, you will help ensure that parliamentarians are informed about the work of DESO and, hopefully, encourage them to press for its closure. Please join in the Lobby, even if you believe your MP is completely sympathetic or opposed to the Lobby's viewpoint.

Pressure from within the constituency is frequently a key factor in influencing an MP's views. A sympathetic MP who is lobbied may be encouraged to take action in Parliament and in her or his party. An MP who is strongly supportive of the arms industry may reconsider the issue if a well reasoned case is calmly presented by constituents. This is especially true if the MP encounters colleagues who have also been lobbied. At the moment, with parliamentary backing for an international Arms Trade Treaty, it is particularly important that MPs are aware of the contradiction of calling for tough arms export controls, whilst at the same time promoting sales.

Some people will have MPs with frontbench responsibilities for arms exports, foreign affairs or trade, or an MP who sits on one of the relevant parliamentary committees. If you are one of these people, your participation in the Lobby is crucial. However, lobbying other MPs is equally important. If the issue is raised with sufficient MPs, this will filter through to those with power. It is also important to realise that this is not an issue on which MPs will necessarily follow the "party line".

## **How to lobby your MP**

### **Contact your MP**

- Ask CAAT if anyone else from your constituency has already registered for the Lobby. If so, you could arrange to go together. The best way to do this is to email [ann@caat.org.uk](mailto:ann@caat.org.uk). Otherwise telephone the office on 020-7281 0297.
- Write to your MP as soon as possible, either at his or her constituency office or at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA. Many MPs also use email, but it is worth phoning his or her office (020-7219 3000 if you don't know the direct number) and asking his or her assistant the best email address to use when requesting an appointment.
- When writing, your letter or email should:
  - refer to any previous correspondence you may have had on the issue of DESO or arms exports more generally;
  - say that you would like to meet her or him in the constituency (or at the House of Commons) at a convenient time before 31st March 2007;
  - ask your MP for an appointment of, for instance, 30 minutes. Tell your MP what time(s) you can manage, but be as flexible as possible;
  - let the MP know if you are coming with other people.
- If, after about a week, you haven't heard back, follow up your letter with a call to the MP's assistant, either in the constituency or at the House of Commons (020-7219 3000).

### **Let CAAT know you will be taking part in the Lobby**

- As soon as you have fixed an appointment with your MP, please fill in the enclosed Registration Form and return it to the CAAT office or email [ann@caat.org.uk](mailto:ann@caat.org.uk) giving the name and constituency of your MP, along with the date of the meeting, your name, address and contact telephone number, and the names of any other people who will be going along with you. This will help enormously with preparations for the Lobby and will also enable CAAT to put other people wishing to lobby your MP in touch with you.

## **Encourage others to join the Lobby**

- You can order Shut DESO materials from the CAAT office by phoning 020-7281 0297 or by emailing [patrick@caat.org.uk](mailto:patrick@caat.org.uk)
- Put information about the Shut DESO campaign Lobby in any magazines, newsletters or circulars you know of, for instance, those produced by your church, local peace group, student group, trade union, United Nations Association branch, Amnesty group.
- Encourage your friends, relatives and workmates to take part in the Lobby.

## **Contact your local media**

- Don't forget to let the local media know you are lobbying your MP on this issue. Although media coverage is not the main aim of the Lobby, publicity will help get the message about DESO to a wider audience. At its simplest, this could be done with a letter to the editor. However, you may be able to do more than this. The Lobby is a classic local media story - a national event with an identifiable local angle. Local papers and local radio are likely to be interested in why you are going and what response you got from your MP, even if you are going alone. If you go as part of a group, or if you go as a representative of a group such as a local church, this will make an even better story.
- When you talk to the press, one thing to bear in mind is how your MP will react. Don't promise to reveal to the media what is said when you meet unless you have agreed this with your MP.

## **Preparing to meet your MP**

- Read the information in the "Shut DESO: time's up for the governments gun-runners" briefing. This should give you all the background information you need, but, if you have any questions, contact the CAAT office on 020-7281 0297 or [ann@caat.org.uk](mailto:ann@caat.org.uk)
- If you don't know very much about your MP and have access to the internet, the short biography at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) is worth looking at. You can also ask Ann at the CAAT office, see above, if you want information about the MP's position on arms export issues.
- If you are seeing your MP along with other constituents, agree on roles between yourselves. You could have, for example:
  - a facilitator who introduces everyone, co-ordinates the contributions and summarises;
  - people to introduce the various different aspects of the issue;
  - a note-taker who listens to the MP and records the discussion, especially notable comments.

## **Meeting your MP**

- Introduce yourself and any others present.
- State your concerns clearly and politely counter any opposing points your MP may make.
- Stick to the issue and try not to be side-tracked into general discussion.

- Listen carefully for areas of agreement and disagreement below the surface of the MP's response.
- Ask questions to probe your MP's attitude more fully. Aim for constructive dialogue, but make challenging points.
- Try to clarify the views of the individual MP, rather than those of his or her party.
- If your MP is sympathetic, ask him or her to press Stephen Timms MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to review DESO's functions and expenditure as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.
- Keep an eye on the time so that you cover all the points you wish to make. Towards the end of your appointment confirm and clarify what the MP has said. Check whether it is acceptable for you to report the MP's views to the local press.
- Throughout your appointment be polite and positive, keep calm and listen. Don't talk so much that you do not hear your MP's views.
- Remember that your MP is a person, just like you, so you need not be anxious about the meeting.

## **Following the meeting**

- Immediately after the meeting, send a letter of thanks to your MP. In your letter you should also summarise what was said.
- Send a copy of the above letter, together with the Follow-up Form, to CAAT.

## **Further information on the Lobby from:**

**Campaign Against Arms Trade, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ**  
**020-7281 0297 telephone / 020-7281 4369 fax**  
**ann@caat.org.uk**