



PRESS RELEASE

French arms sales: Human rights organisations and investigative media challenge France's opaque arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE before the French administrative court.

Berlin/Paris, 23 September 2021. Today, human rights organizations [Amnesty International France](#), the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)) and the French investigative media NGO, [Disclose](#), demand the Paris administrative court order French customs authorities to disclose information relating to the export of military equipment, training and maintenance to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There is a considerable risk that these exported weapons are used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law, affecting the civilian population in Yemen. The organizations argue that the refusal to communicate information regarding these exports violates the right of the public to receive information necessary to a free political debate.

The organizations are accompanied in the proceedings by [Riquest](#), an NGO promoting the right to freedom of expression and access to information.

The legal challenge follows two unanswered requests for information submitted by the organizations to the French customs authorities and the French Commission on Access to Administrative Documents (CADA). The organizations asked customs to disclose export documents specifying the quantities, dates and final destinations of certain war materials produced by France and reported to have been used in the conflict in Yemen. These included; Mirage 2000-9 aircraft (Dassault), Storm Shadow missiles (MBDA France), Damocles and Talios pods (Thales) and Caesar cannons (Nexter).

Despite the overwhelming evidence of indiscriminate attacks on civilians by the Saudi and UAE-led coalition in Yemen since 2015, France has delivered more than 8 billion euros worth of war materials over the period 2015-2020 to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, thus taking the deliberate risk of facilitating the commission of possible war crimes. Yet, France is bound by international, European and French obligations which prohibit arms transfers when there is a clear risk that the arms could be used in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The lack of transparency into France's arms transfers is a major obstacle to parliamentary, judicial and democratic control, inhibiting a meaningful oversight of France's international obligations under human rights law.

In 2019, an investigation conducted by Disclose revealed to the public the use of several French weapons in the conflict in Yemen. A survey conducted by Harris Interactive in 2021 revealed that three out of four French people want more transparency and control over French arms exports, and 72% believe that trading arms which are used in countries such as Yemen contradicts French values and should be the subject of a public debate.

Under law, any infringement of the right of the public to receive information must be strictly proportionate, justified and legitimate. Secrecy can no longer serve as an unconditional excuse for the French state to oppose the communication of information indispensable to a free and informed public debate on French arms sales.

Additional information:

In December 2019, Amnesty International and ECCHR, with the support of five other Yemeni and European NGOs, submitted a [300-page communication](#) to the ICC prosecutor's office regarding arms exports to Saudi Arabia and Yemen approved by senior European - including French - business and government officials. The organizations are calling for an investigation into their alleged complicity in 26 airstrikes that unlawfully killed or injured civilians and destroyed or damaged schools, hospitals and other protected property.

[Survey Harris Interactive on French arms exports.](#)

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