



Medact, The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK

- 1 United Nations Global Compact. <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/> (accessed March 5, 2007).
- 2 Reed Elsevier Socially Responsible Supplier (SRS) Group. <http://www.reed-elsevier.com/media/pdf/n/6/SRS%20Group.pdf> (accessed March 15, 2007).
- 3 Reed Exhibitions Aerospace and Defence Group. Defence Systems and Equipment International 2007: the world's most prestigious defence exhibition. <http://www.dsei.co.uk/exhibitors/DSEI07Brochure.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2007).



The Lancet, as the foremost medical journal on global health issues, engages with all threats to human longevity or mental and physical wellbeing. As a result, its editorial and scientific content frequently becomes required reading for governments, transnational companies, and the UN, in addition to its bread and butter clientele of health professionals, patients, and international news media.

It is thus shocking to hear that the publisher of *The Lancet*, Reed Elsevier, continues to align itself so supportively with the arms trade, the products of which directly generate massive civilian mortality and suffering and prop up regimes that commit gross violations of international human rights law. Exhibitors at an arms fair in 2006 run by the Reed Elsevier's subsidiary company, Reed Exhibitions, included manufacturers of electroshock batons, stun guns, and stun belts, which are banned by the EU because their use amounts to torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

The Lancet's traditionally progressive stance on medicine and health is a priceless global resource and its reputation must not be compromised by an association with products so manifestly harmful to mankind.

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2 years ago your Editorial staff and International Advisory Board took the courageous and correct step to criticise the practices of your parent company, Reed Elsevier, in the hosting of arms trade fairs.¹

The arms trade industry as it stands has little good to say for itself. It encourages transgressions of the various Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war, wastes public money, catalyses conflict and war, institutionalises corruption, glorifies violence, sustains oppressive and genocidal regimes, and excuses the conduct of torture.

Reed Elsevier is undoubtedly associated with these reprehensible aspects of the arms industry, and by association, so is *The Lancet*. Your request to Reed Elsevier to "divest itself of all business interests that threaten human, and especially civilian, health and wellbeing" has clearly been ignored.

We therefore write to express our support of your position on this issue and to say that we will be asking Reed Elsevier directly to get out of this sordid industry and instead align itself to the values and principles espoused by *The Lancet*.

Arturo Quizphe, Alexis Benos, Bridget Lloyd, Ravi Narayan, Claudio Schuftan, *David McCoy, Delen de la Paz, David Legge, Jihad Mashal, Lanny Smith, Majja Kagis, Ghassan Issa, Fran Baum, Alaa Shukrallah, Hani Serag, Prem John, Zafrullah Chowdury, David Sanders, Sarah Shannon, Khor Kok Peng, on behalf of the People's Health Movement
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- 1 The Lancet and The Lancet Editorial Advisory Board. Reed Elsevier and the arms trade. *Lancet* 2005; **366**: 868.

Medsin is a student organisation aiming to tackle local and global health inequalities. As future health-care professionals, we are alarmed that

The Lancet is published by a company heavily involved in the international arms trade.

Reed Elsevier's subsidiaries are responsible for organising arms fairs in the UK (Defence Systems and Equipment International [DSEI]) and abroad (Latin American Aero and Defence).¹ Delegates from countries perpetrating human rights abuses were invited to DSEI 2005, where weapons used to carry out torture and cluster bombs were on sale, despite these being illegal for export from the UK.²

We believe that involvement in the arms trade is incompatible with the publishing of a journal committed to international public health. It contravenes several articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably the "right to life, liberty and security of person".³ Reed Elsevier is a signatory of the UN Global Compact, supporting and respecting human rights.⁴ It is therefore breaking its own ethical code by continuing to organise arms fairs. Furthermore, promoting the sale of arms to developing countries undermines health systems by encouraging spending on arms rather than health sector development, education, and sanitation.⁵

We call on Reed Elsevier to free itself of association with the arms trade. If it does not, we ask shareholders to reconsider their support for an industry incompatible with the realisation of health as a universal human right. Medsin are wholly supportive of *The Lancet's* ongoing work on conflict and its position on this issue. However, if the association of Reed Elsevier with this industry is not abandoned, we must ask *The Lancet* to find an alternative publisher.

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- 1 Campaign Against Arms Trade. Reed Elsevier: the Arms Fair specialists. <http://www.caat.org.uk/armsfairs/reed.php> (accessed Feb 25, 2007).