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Jan Hommen,
Chairman, Reed Elsevier,
Reed Elsevier PLC,
1-3 Strand,
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29th of June 2005

Dear Mr Hommen

I was disappointed to discover that your company, through the subsidiary Spearhead Exhibitions, organises arms fairs. As an academic my familiarity with Elsevier comes from the scientific and medical journals you publish. It seems an entirely inappropriate sideline for you to assist in the selling of weapons. Will you stop?

As well as arms fairs in Brazil, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Singapore and France, Spearhead also organises the DSEi arms fair which is held biannually in London Docklands and boasts of being the largest arms fair in the world. This is a key event for those on the arms trade circuit, a trade which results in death, mutilation and suffering (most casualties of war are civilians, of course). Previous invitees to the fair have included nations such as Syria, which has refused to sign the Biological or Chemical Weapons Conventions and is accused of being a danger to world peace, and Indonesia, which used UK built Hawk jets in its lethal repression in East Timor. Other nations with long records of human rights abuses - Columbia, Saudia Arabia, Israel and China for example - attend, as well as a host of private companies with a history of selling indiscriminately to irresponsible governments in trouble spots around the world. Selling things like clusterbombs, which, like landmines, kill civilians years after the conflict that caused them to be dropped is over, but which aren't illegal like landmines. Selling the small arms which are responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in war (and killed 500,000 people last year). Selling missile technology, selling depleted uranium shells. By organising events at which these companies can market and promote this equipment, your company is playing a direct role in facilitating this trade. And all this subsidised directly, and indirectly, by UK tax payers.

This arms fair is important to the defence industry, but it's not a major part of your business - and I urge you to cease your involvement with it. Organising international arms fairs seems totally at odds with your company's expressed aim to play 'a positive role in our local and global communities' (2003's 'Reed Elsevier Cares' programme). I also wonder how the academic and medical communities would feel about your complicity in the arms trade. My feeling is that you would- rightly- lose a lot goodwill from academics, goodwill that you rely on for them to publish in, review, edit and purchase your journals. You'll be aware that Elsevier publishes the prestigious medical journal The Lancet - this seems especially incongruous with involvement in the arms trade. Can you really justify using profits from publicly funded medical research budgets to support the sale of arms around the world?

I'd be very keen to hear back from you about these things. Specifically the three questions I've asked in this letter:

- Will you stop helping to organise arms fairs, specifically DSEi (next scheduled for September 2005)?
- How does your involvement in the arms trade square with playing 'a positive role in our local and global communities'?
- How should the members of academic and medical communities feel about this involvement?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

Tom Stafford

P.s. I have made this an open letter. The text is available at http://www.idiolect.org.uk/docs/jul05/elsevier_openletter.pdf