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Global military spending rises amid pandemic

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GDAMS 2021 Global Day of Action on Military Spending

Global military spending increases again despite worldwide pandemic and urgent need for climate action



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DEFEND** THE MILITARY
PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending
<https://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

Global military spending increased in 2020, despite the worldwide pandemic and urgent need for climate action, according to figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) today - the Global Day of Action on Military Spending.

SIPRI has estimated global military expenditure last year was at least \$1,981 billion (US) - an average of more than \$5.42 billion (US) every day. This comprises a 2.6% increase in real terms from 2019, and is 9.3% higher than in 2011.^[1]

By way of contrast, on average more than 14,246 children under the age of five died every day last year from mainly preventable causes - lack of access to adequate food, clean water and basic medicines - a figure UNICEF describes as “unconscionable”.^[2] This is one of the prices paid, the collateral damage that is seldom talked about, for maintaining armed forces in a state of combat readiness around the world.

It is beyond belief that many states - including New Zealand - continue to prioritise spending on combat-ready armed forces over human health and wellbeing, and care for the planet. Over the past year the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated lives and livelihoods around the world, highlighted and exacerbated systemic social, economic and political inequities, and exposed multiple flaws in government spending and other priorities, including the folly of maintaining armed forces in a constant state of combat readiness when there are so many other more pressing needs.

It is more obvious than ever before that military spending does nothing to address the major global threats and their local impacts, whether a pandemic, obscene levels of poverty and social inequality, or the escalating climate crisis - instead, military spending diverts resources that could be put to far better use.

Every dollar of military expenditure is a dollar taken away from socially useful spending - a dollar that could be used to reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change, to ensure a decent standard of living for all, to ensure health and social welfare systems can function well in national, regional or global emergencies: it is a dollar that could be used to save lives, to promote flourishing communities and care for the planet, rather than being spent on endless preparations for war.

The five biggest spenders in 2020 were the United States, China, India, Russia and the United Kingdom, which together accounted for 62% of world military spending. The military burden (military expenditure as a share of gross domestic product, GDP) increased across all regions in

2020. The military burden was an average of 1.5% of GDP for countries in the Americas; 1.8% for Africa, Asia and Oceania, and Europe; and 4.9% for the countries in the Middle East for which data is available.^[1]

However, there is a ray of hope in this grim picture - some states explicitly reallocated part of their planned military spending to pandemic response last year, including Chile which reallocated \$936 million (US) intended to finance the modernization of its fleet of F-16 combat aircraft to cover costs associated with the pandemic. This highlights that military spending is a matter of what governments choose to prioritise, and it is an example that New Zealand could usefully follow.

New Zealand's military spending

While New Zealand does not feature in the SIPRI table ranking the highest increases in military spending around the world this year as it did last year^[3], that is only because other states increased their spending by higher percentages in 2020 - not because there has been any substantive reduction in New Zealand's military spending.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, essential public services including health, education, support for persons with disabilities, and housing desperately needed increased spending, yet the New Zealand government continues to prioritise military spending.

In last year's 'Rebuilding Together' Budget, military spending was a total of \$4,621,354,000 (NZ) - an average of more than \$88.8 million every week.^[4] There has been no indication that New Zealand will follow Chile's excellent example and reallocate the \$20 billion (NZ) to be spent over the next decade on increased combat capability, warships and military aircraft to socially useful spending.^[4]

The ongoing prioritising of military spending - whether here in Aotearoa or around the world - is a reflection of a dominant ideology that focuses on outdated narrow military security concepts, rather than real human security that meets the needs of all, and it continues to harm the future of humanity and the planet.

It is truly shameful that military spending continues to rise in the midst of a global pandemic and rapidly worsening climate emergency - a transition from combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies that meet the needs of all peoples and the planet is long overdue.^[5]

Resources and references:

- Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>
- SIPRI, <https://www.sipri.org>
- Share: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/3897934690253871>
Tweet, <https://twitter.com/PeaceMovementA/status/1386441940908994560>

^[1] 'World military spending rises to almost \$2 trillion in 2020', SIPRI, 26 April 2021, available at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm> and 'Trends in world military expenditure 2020', SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2021 are available at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

^[2] 'Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2020', UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, September 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality>

^[3] 'Global military spending increases, New Zealand ranks in report', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 27 April 2020, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzgdams2020.pdf>

^[4] 'Welfare or warfare? Military spending in Budget 2020', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 14 May 2020, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzbudget2020.pdf>

^[5] As outlined, for example, in 'Welfare or warfare? Military spending in Budget 2020', note above.