



Reaching Critical Will

a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Military spending

In 2011, global military expenditures reached approximately 1.74 trillion USD. [SIPRI notes](#), “The small rise of just 0.3 per cent in 2011 marks the end of a run of continuous increases in military spending between 1998 and 2010, including an annual average increase of 4.5 per cent between 2001 and 2009.”

There are many direct and indirect links between military expenditure, the arms trade, violent conflict, and the reduction of available resources for social and economic development. Governments that spend excessive financial, technological, and human resources on their militaries divert resources from economic, social, and environmental programmes. The military-industrial complex—composed of a state's armed forces, the government, suppliers of weapons systems and services (corporations), and academic institutions that conduct research on weapon systems and designs—absorbs vast amounts of funding that could otherwise be spent on human security, including the achievement of the [Millennium Development Goals](#). Furthermore, funds reserved for development initiatives are increasingly spent on emergency relief and rehabilitation operations to clean up after violent conflict.

Military investments are underpinned by a belief that states' security can be guaranteed by threats of violence. It's an investment in war and conflict. And while government's use the language of security and protection to justify their excessive investment in military hardware and personnel, it is usually civilians that pay the highest price—with their lives, livelihoods, and rights—when states go to war. Given the numerous crises facing the planet—economic, environmental, food, water, health, energy—it is imperative to shift money wasted on excessive military spending to human needs and rights. This challenges militarism by calling on governments to stop spending disproportionate financial, technological, and human resources on militaries and demands governments invest in peace.

Above all else, weapons are tools of violence and repression by those that use them and tools of financial gain by those who make and sell them. The international arms trade is a booming industry and the international systems that were created to uphold international law and secure human rights have been subordinated to the economic and political interests of governments and corporations. While many states promote themselves as advocates for international peace, justice, and security, and claim to promote international disarmament, the same states are often leaders in the international arms trade, which contributes to fueling conflicts, human rights violations, and disrupting peace processes.

While military expenditures increase every year, investment in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and development lags far behind. Since the end of the Cold War, militarism has been growing in response to an increasingly unstable world, propelling the world even further into tension and war. Armed conflict—and the constant threat of war or terrorism—has become both the cause of and response to this growing militarism. War and the threat of war destroy lives, infrastructure, and well-being, creating a culture of fear, violence, and instability. This impedes development by upsetting social programmes, education, transportation, business, and tourism, which prevents economic stability, mental well-being, and sustainable livelihoods. The manufacture and use of weapons also prevents sustainable ecological development and preservation, creating unequal access to resources and further impeding poverty reduction initiatives.

The continued investment in militarism does not make the world safer. Weapons cannot address the main threats people all over the world are facing today, such as natural disasters, increased food prices, and lack of adequate health care, education, and a clean environment. Yet these threats are aggravating arms races and weapons development. SIPRI has warned that growing competition for natural resources “may lead to increased military spending as a means of protecting resources from internal or external threats, while resource revenues are often a source of funding for arms purchases.”

What would you rather pay for?

- One year of the world's military spending, or over 24 years of the additional foreign aid required to reach the MDGs by 2015?
- One year of the world's military spending, or 700 years of the UN regular budget?
- One year of the world's military spending, or 2928 years of the new UN women's agency?

WILPF materials

[WILPF statement on the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals](#), 20 September 2010

[WILPF statement on Global Day of Action on Military Spending](#), 12 April 2011

[Military Spending Toolkit](#) includes a draft letter to government officials requesting their consideration of military spending, development assistance, and reporting to the [Register of Conventional Arms](#) and [Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures](#). We also welcome you to invite your government officials to a meeting to discuss these matters—the kit includes talking points for your meeting, and some sample questions that you could give your sympathetic representatives to ask in parliament or equivalent, in order to raise these issues—and receive answers—at the highest levels of government.

[Fact sheet on Article 26 of the UN Charter](#), which directly challenges and addresses militarism. It demands disarmament and reduced military expenditures as a precondition for increased security, development, and peace and it places the Security Council at the centre of enforcing disarmament and redirecting resources away from military security and towards human security. Find out more about Article 26 and how to use it in your work for peace, economic justice, and disarmament.

[Fact sheet on disarmament and development](#) looks at the intersections of these two vital concepts. The United Nations recognizes disarmament and development as "two of the international community's most important tools for building a world free from want." Disarmament helps create conditions favourable for development, while development creates conditions favourable for disarmament. However, they do not automatically trigger each other: disarmament must be accompanied by efforts to build or rebuild economic, social, and governing structures that foster political participation and social integration and equality, and that transfer resources effectively to the programmes and efforts that require them most. Disarmament also does not automatically result in a surplus of resources—the disarmament process can be expensive, and funds freed from a reduction in military spending will not necessarily be immediately plugged into disarmament measures.

[You Get What You Pay For](#) explains the disparity between spending on militaries and warfare and spending on gender equality. Full of astounding statistics, You Get What You Pay For outlines the cost of achieving gender equality, the utility of gender budgeting, and the price of fulfilling all of the Millennium Development Goals.

[Dirty Dozen: corporate partners in mass destruction](#) is a research project that names a baker's dozen of the world's dirtiest arms manufacturers. Updated in 2007 with information on corporate involvement in missile defense and the weaponization of outer space.

[Nuclear weapons, political economy, and social change](#) is a research project focusing on the political economy of nuclear weapons—in particular, what organizations and segments of society benefit from the existence of nuclear weapons and given this, what can be done to achieve disarmament—while promoting a wider framework of discussion that includes many other aspects of human security and other challenges to relevant social change.

[International Women's Day Seminar 2008: At What Cost?: Women, Wars, Weapons, and Conflict Prevention](#) highlighted the crises of human security and sustainable development caused by military spending, war and weapon profiteering, and the persistence of ideas and expectations of gender that shape how war, women, and peace are considered. Read the seminar statement, speeches, and find out more information on this annual seminar.

Other resources

[Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#)

[Global Day of Action on Military Spending](#)

[UN Office for Disarmament Affairs military expenditure counter](#)