

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF.



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WILPF Statement on the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals

20 September 2010

With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend a summit in New York on 20–22 September to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. The *2010 MDG Report*, produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, notes that “unmet commitments, inadequate resources, lack of focus and accountability, and insufficient dedication to sustainable development have created shortfalls in many areas.” Some of these shortfalls, the report explains, were aggravated by the global food, climate, economic, and financial crises as well as armed conflict. The report estimates that poverty rates will continue to increase throughout the world as a result of the persisting global economic crisis.

However, upon releasing its 2010 Yearbook, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute noted, “The financial crisis and economic recession that have affected most of the globe appeared to have little effect on levels of military expenditure, arms production or arms transfers.” In 2009, worldwide military expenditure totaled an estimated 1531 billion USD, which is an increase of 5.9% in real terms compared to 2008 and an increase of 49% since 2000. Of those countries for which data was available, 65% increased their military spending in real terms in 2009.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom emphasizes the 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-academic 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.

While military expenditures increase every year, investment in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and development lags far behind. As SIPRI notes in the release of its 2010 Yearbook, while the financial crisis did not seem to affect military spending, it “probably did undermine the willingness and ability of major governments and multilateral institutions to invest other, non-military resources to address the challenges and instabilities that threaten societies and individuals around the world.”

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

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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.” Therefore, in the context of the 2010 UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, WILPF urges UN member states and civil society to consider, 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?

Article 26 of the UN Charter mandates the UN Security Council with formulating a plan to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources. The Security Council has entirely neglected this responsibility and its permanent members have instead engaged in weapons profiteering and arms races, resulting in crises of international, national, and human security and of sustainable development.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom calls on all governments to:

- reduce military spending and redirect that expenditure to meet human and environmental needs, including fulfilling the MDGs;
- report on military spending and arms trade through the established UN mechanisms;
- support a robust legally-binding arms trade treaty that prevents arms transfers where there is a risk of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and that acknowledges the impact of the arms trade on socio-economic development; and
- call on the UN Security Council to report on progress made towards a plan to reduce the human and economic resources spent on armaments and indicate an intention to evaluate the Security Council's performance and initiatives towards advancing article 26 in the next General Assembly session.

WILPF also calls on civil society to push their governments to meet these goals and to make the reduction of militarism a global norm by reframing the concept of security with a premium on universal human and ecological security, multilateralism, and a commitment to cooperative, nonviolent means of conflict resolution.

We urge all governments present in New York this week to commit to making their MDG policies and strategies consistent with their obligations under Article 26 of the UN Charter and to remember that establishing peace and security for all humans is not separate from actions to fight poverty—it is central to these efforts.