

MDGs SUMMIT: CIVIL SOCIETY SPEAKS UP FOR NEW PRIORITIES CHALLENGE MILITARISM IN ORDER TO TACKLE POVERTY !

Geneva, August 20, 2010. The worldwide struggle to overcome poverty reaches a new landmark in one month's time with the convening of the UN's Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in New York (Sept. 20-22). The meeting is the latest in a long line of high-level discussions designed to develop strategies to tackle the scandal of mass poverty in an age of unprecedented wealth.

"Our world possesses the knowledge and the resources to achieve the MDGs", the Secretary-General correctly states in his report in preparation for the Summit. "Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve the MDGs."

Development cannot be reduced to a matter of economics alone; many transformations are required. But money is of course essential. Unfortunately the plans being put before the leaders once again make no reference to the largest collection of economic resources available to governments: the vast treasury known as global military spending.

The SG's report does refer to armed conflicts. Indeed it highlights the '*underlying drivers, risk factors and tensions*' at the root of violence and war. Yet as organizations working with issues of armaments and violence, we would argue that one of the principal '*underlying drivers*' is the ever-rising level of investment in the military sector. The latest figures¹ indicate that the annual total of global military spending by governments in 2009 reached its highest-ever peak of **US\$1,531 billion**. So once again we call the attention of governments to this great pool of public resources which is unavailable either for development efforts or for climate change mitigation.

As General Eisenhower said in his much-quoted speech:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.²

The issues of concern go far beyond distorted priorities in official government spending. There are the phenomena of the arms trade, with its accompanying baggage of corruption and greed; of the unaccountable private security companies and their increasing share of the military pie; of the militarisation of the aid business; of costly military bases and alliances; of occupations and atrocities against civilians in the name of 'promoting democracy'; and finally, looming over all, of the continuing threat to humanity on its cross of iron: nuclear weapons.³

¹ from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://www.sipri.org>

² Dwight D. Eisenhower, to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1953.

³ These issues will be debated at the international conference to be held in Oslo 23-26 September in celebration of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the International Peace Bureau exactly 100 years ago. <http://ipb100.org>

In its 'Suggested themes for the round tables' the UN report asks: *How can financing be ensured for global public goods, including meeting existing commitments on financing for development and new challenges such as climate change?*

Yet again we will hear talk at the Summit of 'innovative financing for development': what could be more innovative than a radical switch in priorities, resulting in a diminished commitment to weapons and soldiers, in favour of a massive boost for global public goods and the titanic challenge of climate change? Though in fact such proposals are hardly new. The UN General Assembly has passed 'Disarmament and Development' resolutions every year for decades now, calling for such a move. The government of Costa Rica has taken a lead in calling for the 'Costa Rica Consensus' to be implemented and for the respect of Article 26 of the UN Charter. The Secretary-General himself has declared that *"The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded"*⁴. There are now also signs of renewed public support and civil society engagement around the world.⁵

The 5 years remaining before the 2015 MDG deadline afford an opportunity to find another way to bridge the gap between the needs identified and the massive public (and private) resources already allocated in quite another direction. We call on all member states participating in the Summit to factor the military dimension into their development equations, and to have the courage to respond to Eisenhower's challenge.

Signed by:

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⁴ Speech at the annual UN DPI/NGO conference, Mexico City, 9 Sept. 2009.

⁵ For example, the Arms Down! Campaign launched by Religions for Peace has collected 4.4 million signatures for its call for 10% reduction of military expenditure to provide for the MDGs.