



Peace Movement Aotearoa

PO Box 9314, Wellington 6141, Aotearoa New Zealand. Tel +64 4 382 8129

Email icanz@xtra.co.nz Web site www.converge.org.nz/pma

Global military spending increases, New Zealand ranks in report

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Global military expenditure increased for the fifth year in a row to according to figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) today, during the Global Days of Action on Military Spending. World military expenditure totalled an estimated \$1,917 billion (US) in 2019 - an increase of 3.6% from 2018 and the largest annual growth in spending since 2010.^[1]

Last year's global military spending averaged out to more than \$5.25 billion (US) every day, while an average of more than 14,520 children under the age of five died every day from mainly preventable causes - lack of access to adequate food, clean water and basic medicines.^[2] That 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.

This year, perhaps more than ever before, as health and social welfare systems around the world collapse as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, it is painfully obvious that military spending does nothing to address the major global threats, whether a pandemic, obscene levels of poverty and social inequality, or climate change - 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, rather than being spent on endless preparations for war.

The five largest spenders in 2019, which accounted for 62% of expenditure, were the United States, China, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia. This is the first time that two Asian states have featured among the top three military spenders.^[1]

Military expenditure increased in at least four of the world's five regions during 2019 - the highest increase was in Europe (5.0%), followed by Asia and Oceania (4.8%), the Americas (4.7%) and Africa (1.5%). For the fifth successive year, SIPRI could not provide an estimate of total spending in the Middle East.^[1]

New Zealand's military spending

Shamefully, this year New Zealand is ranked at number 13 in the SIPRI table ranking the highest increases in military spending around the world. The SIPRI figures, which are based on self-reporting by the government, put the 2019 increase at 19%.

However, the government figures do not include military spending across all three of the Budget Votes where it is mostly itemised: Vote Defence, Vote Defence Force and Vote Education. The increase in military spending in the 2019 Budget - the first 'Wellbeing Budget' - when compared with the allocation in the 2018 Budget was 24.73%.^[3]

The allocation for military spending in last year's 'Wellbeing Budget' increased to a record total of \$5,058,286,000 (NZ) - an average of \$97,274,730 (NZ) every week. By way of contrast, more than 20% of children here are estimated to live in a family with an income below the poverty line, and an estimated one in one hundred New Zealanders are homeless.

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 government continues to prioritise military spending - in addition to the increase in last year's Budget, in June 2019 the government announced that it would spend \$(NZ)20 billion over the next decade on increased combat capability, frigates and military aircraft.

The shocking increase in military spending - whether here in Aotearoa or around the world - shows the same dominant ideology that focuses on outdated narrow military security concepts, rather than real human security that meets the needs of all, continues to harm us all.

If there is any lesson to be learnt from the current pandemic, surely it is that there must be a transition from combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies that meet the needs of all peoples and the planet.^[4]

Resources and references:

- Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>
- 'Global military spending increases, New Zealand ranks in report', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 27 April 2020 - <https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/global-military-spending-increases-new-zealand-ranks-in-report/2895290027185014>

^[1] 'Global military expenditure sees largest annual increase in a decade - says SIPRI - reaching \$1917 billion in 2019', SIPRI, 27 April 2020, available at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm> and 'Trends in world military expenditure 2019', SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2020 are available at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

^[2] Levels and Trends in Child Mortality Report, Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, September 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/levels-and-trends-child-mortality-report-2019>

^[3] 'Wellbeing Budget: Shocking rise in NZ military spending', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 29 May 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/wellbeing-budget-shocking-rise-in-nz-military-spending/2230103127037044>

^[4] As outlined, for example, in 'Wellbeing Budget: Shocking rise in NZ military spending', note above.