



Peace Movement Aotearoa

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Election 2023: 'Let's get Disarmament on the Agenda' Resource

September / October 2023

Election 2023

Let's get disarmament on the agenda!

- What would good disarmament policy look like?
- What should you ask the candidates?
- What do the political parties say?

⇒ Space launches ⇒ Military spending
⇒ Explosive weapons in populated areas
⇒ Women, peace and security agenda
⇒ Climate change and military activity
⇒ Autonomous weapon systems ⇒ AUKUS

 #BudgetForPeace #WelfareNotWarfare #ClimateJustice
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Introduction

The rapidly escalating climate emergency is devastating lives and livelihoods, increasing humanitarian crises, irreversibly harming the environment and destroying biodiversity around the world. The lack of collective action by governments to protect peoples and the planet continues to highlight and exacerbate systemic social, economic and political inequities, and exposes the 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.

New Zealand and other governments continue to focus on short-sighted outdated narrow notions of military "security" rather than real human security that promotes human health and wellbeing, flourishing communities, social justice, climate action and climate justice, protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, and care for the planet.

Their endless harmful preparations for war do not, and never will, do anything to address the major global threats and their local impacts, whether the climate catastrophe, obscene levels of poverty and social inequity, or a pandemic - instead, their support for constant military activity that directly contributes to climate change is diverting resources that could be put to far better use, and reflects a destructive mindset that threatens the future of life on earth.

The critical need for cooperation at every level - local, national, regional and global - to find solutions to the issues that affect us all is clearer than ever before, as is the need to promote better sustainable ways forward from what we have now.

Humanitarian disarmament - which prioritises care for peoples and the planet, the prevention of harm, and global cooperation for the common good - provides a pathway for a better future, and we need your help to get disarmament on the agenda for this year's election so that it becomes a higher priority for the next government and those that follow.

Whether you are concerned about climate justice globally or locally, levels of poverty and social inequities, the failing health system, lack of affordable housing, environmental degradation, or declining biodiversity, disarmament has something positive to offer.

If you value the welfare of peoples and the planet above endless harmful preparations for war, please use and share this resource and the links at <http://disarm.org.nz> - thank you.

Our Election 2023 'Let's get disarmament on the agenda' resource has four sections:

- A) What would good disarmament policy look like?
- B) What the political parties say about disarmament;
- C) Disarmament questions for candidates; and
- D) Where you can get more information.

A) What would good disarmament policy look like?

This section has an overview of our minimum requirements for a good disarmament policy:

Uphold existing standards

- uphold the legislation prohibiting biological, chemical, nuclear and indiscriminate weapons, including landmines and cluster munitions
- uphold the controls on the export of weapons and military technology
- continue the Disarmament and Arms Control Ministerial portfolio
- ensure any military activity is fully consistent with disarmament, human rights and humanitarian law, and does not leave any unexploded ordnance anywhere

Develop new standards

- enact legislation to ban the development, production, deployment and use of autonomous weapon systems in Aotearoa New Zealand (autonomous weapon)

systems, also known as killer robots, are weapon systems that use artificial intelligence and sensors to select targets and attack independently, without any meaningful level of human control)

Increase disarmament diplomacy

- increase the level of resourcing for disarmament diplomacy
- promote global implementation of existing disarmament treaties
- promote the development of new disarmament law, for example, to ensure human control over the use of force and to prohibit autonomous weapons
- promote implementation of new disarmament standards, for example, around the use of explosive weapons in populated areas

Promote welfare, not warfare

- reduce the level of annual military spending
- cancel the planned multi-billion dollar combat capability upgrade
- transition from armed forces to civilian agencies for fisheries and resource protection, search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance
- focus foreign policy on promoting sustainable peace
- stay away from AUKUS and all other military alliances

B) What the political parties say about disarmament

In August 2023, we sent nine questions to seven political parties (ACT, Green Party, Labour, National, NZ First, Te Pāti Māori and TOP) asking about their policies on disarmament and arms control, space launches, military spending, use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the women, peace and security agenda, climate change and military activity, autonomous weapon systems, and AUKUS.

This was necessary because none of the political parties have a comprehensive disarmament policy available in a single document, although the Green and Labour parties have some disarmament elements in their respective manifestos. To date, we have received replies from four: ACT, Green Party, Labour and National - a summary of each party's position is included below, and the full replies are available in a separate document 'Election 2023: What the political parties say' at <http://disarm.org.nz>

As discussed in our International Day of Peace 'Let's get disarmament on the agenda' [online forum](#), based on the replies received, the **Green Party** has the most points in common with our recommendations of what good disarmament policy should look like, and they share Peace Movement Aotearoa's commitment to using non-violent means to resolve conflict. However, there is some room for improvement especially around military spending and analysis of the impact of military activity on climate change, and their space launch policy could usefully include [a prohibition on any launch of military command, control, targeting or geopositioning systems](#) for weapons that are banned under New Zealand law.

Labour's reply is the most detailed and includes information about some of the disarmament policy it has developed while in government, which has indeed resulted in progress around New Zealand's support for the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) and the international Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas ([EWIPA Declaration](#)), among other positive developments.

Overall however, while Labour's disarmament policy may look good on paper, the way it has been put into practice is disappointing - especially around [space launches from Aotearoa](#), and [autonomous weapon systems](#). Also disappointing is Labour's continued focus on maintaining combat ready armed forces [regardless of the annual cost](#), to [increase combat capability](#) over the next 15 years, their apparent interest [in joining AUKUS Pillar II](#); and their lack of commitment to a second Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan ([the first expired in 2019](#)).

National's disarmament and arms control priorities remain somewhat obscure based on the replies received from the Leader's office (clearly written by someone who is not working on disarmament given the reply about the [EWIPA Declaration](#) which New Zealand endorsed last year) and the lack of any visible reference to disarmament on their web site. Generally speaking, over recent years National's disarmament priorities have been similar to Labour's which is reflected in some of the replies to the questions, but the lack of a clear policy to hold them to account is a concern.

It seems National does intend to keep the Disarmament and Arms Control portfolio / shadow portfolio, which is good news as the position was disestablished by the National-led government in 2011 then [reinstated by Labour in 2018](#).

ACT has no disarmament policy; it supports more military "security" arrangements, and plans to increase military spending, roll-back the firearms legislation and abolish the gun registry.

C) Disarmament questions for candidates

Here are some suggestions for questions to help get disarmament on the agenda in 2023:

Disarmament policy

- Does your party have a disarmament policy?
- Does your party have a disarmament spokesperson?
- Does your party support having a specific Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control? (The portfolio is specified in the NZ Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987)

Ban autonomous weapon systems

- Does your party support a national ban on autonomous weapon systems? (Autonomous weapon systems, also known as killer robots, are weapon systems that

use artificial intelligence and sensors to select targets and attack independently, without any meaningful level of human control)

Increase disarmament diplomacy

- Does your party support an increase in the level of resourcing for disarmament diplomacy?

Promote welfare, not warfare

- Does your party support a reduction in annual military spending? (Budget 2023 allocation = \$ \$6.6+ billion, average \$127.5+ million per week, military spending is consistently under-reported so check the [latest figures here](#))
- Does your party support the planned multi-billion dollar combat capability upgrade?
- Does your party support a shift in foreign policy to focus on promoting sustainable peace?
- Does your party support a transition from armed forces to a civilian coastguard and other agencies for fisheries and resource protection, search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance?
- Does your party support New Zealand joining AUKUS or any other military alliance?

It would be really helpful if you can let us know about any replies you receive, who the reply was from, and the date - please email to Peace Movement Aotearoa, icanz@xtra.co.nz

D) Where you can get more information

- ‘Election 2023: Let’s get disarmament on the agenda’ resources and links, including images to share, documents formatted for printing, and links to disarmament campaigns and peace projects in Aotearoa New Zealand, <http://disarm.org.nz/>
- ‘Budget 2023: Building for tomorrow? Military spending increases by 12.2%’, Peace Movement Aotearoa, 18 May 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/6186729694707681> and ‘Global military spending increase: Militarism will cost us the earth’, Peace Movement Aotearoa, 24 April 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/6107093852671266>
- Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>
- Other humanitarian disarmament campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/campaigns.htm>

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