



# Peace Movement Aotearoa

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## Global military spending threatens us all: Militarism will cost us the earth

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Despite the urgent need for cooperative international action to avert total climate catastrophe and other existential threats to humanity, global military spending last year increased to the highest level ever recorded by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) according to new figures released today - the Global Day of Action on Military Spending.

SIPRI has estimated global military expenditure last year was at least \$2,887 billion (USD, ±\$4,910 billion NZD), an increase of 2.9% in real terms over 2024 and the 11th consecutive year of increase. <sup>[1]</sup> On average,

military spending last year is equivalent to more than \$7.9 billion (USD, ±\$13.5 billion NZD) squandered every day on incessant preparations for war.

While the horrific impacts of this are obvious in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Lebanon, Ethiopia and far too many other places over the past year, the devastation of armed conflict is not the only casualty of military spending - it has wider consequences that threaten us all.

By way of comparison, for example, global funding for official development (ODA) and humanitarian assistance last year dropped by 23.1% in real terms to only 6% of the amount of military spending <sup>[2]</sup>, while on average more than 13,300 children under the age of five died every day from mainly preventable causes <sup>[3]</sup> - lack of access to adequate food, clean water and basic medicines: that is more than nine tragically senseless deaths every minute.

This 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; an appalling situation that will worsen this year as some states, including Britain, have announced more of their ODA contribution will be diverted to increased military spending.

As another comparison, at COP30 last year, pledges for loss and damage funding for vulnerable countries most susceptible to the devastating impacts of climate change reached a total amount equivalent to 0.014% of global military spending; while the total amount of funding committed by the global Green Climate Fund is equivalent to 0.69% of military expenditure. <sup>[4]</sup>

It is inexcusable that many states - including New Zealand - continue to prioritise spending on combat-ready armed forces over human health and wellbeing, and care for the planet. The opportunity cost of military spending is multiple opportunities lost. Every dollar of military expenditure is a dollar taken away from socially useful spending - a dollar that could be used to take real action on climate change, to ensure a decent standard of living for all, and 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, to promote climate justice, flourishing communities and care for the planet, rather than being spent on endless preparations for war.

The multiple threats to humanity and the planet - the rapidly escalating climate catastrophe, rising sea levels, intensifying extreme weather events, humanitarian disasters, horrific armed conflicts, environmental degradation, collapsing ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, species extinction, and increasing levels of social inequity - are devastating lives and livelihoods around the world; while highlighting and exacerbating systemic social, economic and political inequities, and exposing multiple 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.

It is obvious that none of these threats can be addressed by increasing military spending and militarisation, and that all are compounded by the deadly priorities of those governments that continue to cling to outdated narrow notions of military security. Armed forces cannot turn the tide on rising sea levels, and increased combat capability cannot provide shelter from cataclysmic storms: instead, militarisation is exacerbating the climate emergency and other catastrophes facing humanity.

Now more than ever, with the future of life on earth at stake, states must work together cooperatively to find sustainable solutions, instead of continuing to pour public money into wasteful destructive military activity - the ultimate in unsustainability, with military emissions estimated to be at least 5.5% of the global total.

- Brief overview of the 2025 figures: The five biggest military spenders were the United States (33%), China (12%), Russia (6.6%), Germany (3.9%) and India (3.2), which together accounted for 58% of world military spending; while expenditure by the 32 NATO member states was 55% of the global figure.

Military expenditure increased in all world regions except the Americas due to military spending decreasing in the United States (primarily due to the fact that no new financial military assistance for Ukraine was approved during the year). Overall, average military expenditure as a share of government expenditure was 6.9%, and the global military burden (military spending as a share of gross domestic product) was 2.5%. <sup>[1]</sup>

### **New Zealand's military spending**

While New Zealand does not feature in the SIPRI rankings of the highest increases in military spending this year as it did in 2023, that is simply because other states increased their spending by more, not because New Zealand's military spending has decreased.

Despite the urgent need for action on climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as the desperate need for increased funding for essential public services including health, housing, education, and support for persons with disabilities, successive New Zealand governments continue to prioritise military spending.

In last year's Budget, it was revealed that military spending in the 2024/25 FY was \$9,212,916,000 (NZD), with \$5,735,742,000 allocated so far for the year ahead ... that's an average of more than \$110 million every week. <sup>[5]</sup> New Zealand's enthusiasm for being an integral part of the global cycle of violence has led to the shameful spectre of military spending being at least doubled over the next seven years, announced last year as New Zealand seeks to be a combat capable "force multiplier" with "enhanced lethality and deterrent effect" - a further threat to the possibility of substantive action on human health and wellbeing, and on climate justice both here in Aotearoa and in the region. <sup>[6]</sup>

Pacific communities and leaders have repeatedly stated that climate change is the existential security threat to the region, but New Zealand's focus is on more militarisation rather than climate action. The

Pacific is already one of the most highly militarised regions in the world, although only four Pacific island nations have armed forces. The overwhelming majority of militarisation in the Pacific comes from outside the region - military bases, military live training exercises, military alliances including AUKUS, military involvement in extractive industries, and military occupation by the armed forces of Indonesia, France and the United States, in particular, as well as increased militarisation by Australia, Britain, China, Russia and New Zealand.

Surely there are better things New Zealand could be doing in the Pacific based on a dedicated focus on demilitarisation so that existing threats can be properly addressed and resourced, rather than fabricating more.

The ongoing prioritising of military spending - whether here in Aotearoa or around the world - is a reflection of the deadly ideology of militarism, a destructive mindset focused on obsolete concepts of military security that continue to harm the future of humanity and the planet, rather than real human security that meets the needs of all.

It is totally reprehensible that military spending continues to rise in the midst of the rapidly worsening climate catastrophe, humanitarian crises, and ongoing social inequities that are often caused, and always made worse, by militarisation: a transition from combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies to meet the needs of all peoples and the planet is long overdue. <sup>[7]</sup>

The IPCC warned three years ago that if we want to have a liveable future, taking the right action now is needed for the transformational change essential for a sustainable, equitable world; then last year UNEP, when releasing the 2025 Emissions Gap Report stated: “If we buckle down, we can still potentially save lives, spare economies and prevent the world from reaching devastating climatic tipping points.” <sup>[8]</sup> Yet just last month, the WMO released its latest statistics which reveal ‘record climate imbalance’. <sup>[9]</sup>

AS UNEP said last year “We have the technology and the know-how to end the climate crisis, what we need now is the political will” <sup>[8]</sup>, and that’s where the problem lies. Clearly it is way past time to invest in the future for peoples and planet, and budget for peace, not war: unless there is an immediate and meaningful change in the priorities of New Zealand and other states, militarism will cost us the earth.

## Resources and references:

Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending, <https://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>  
SIPRI, [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org) Image, [www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/1419085846915210](https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/1419085846915210)

<sup>[1]</sup> ‘Global military spending rise continues as European and Asian expenditures surge’, SIPRI, 27 April 2026, and ‘Trends in world military expenditure 2024’, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2026, both are available at <https://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

<sup>[2]</sup> ‘International aid fell sharply in 2025, says OECD’, OECD, 16 April 2025

<sup>[3]</sup> ‘Progress in reducing child deaths slows as 4.9 million children under five die in 2024’, UNICEF, 17 March 2026

<sup>[4]</sup> See, for example, ‘What happened on loss and damage at COP 30?’, Loss and Damage Collaboration, 22 November 2025 and Green Climate Fund dashboard, 26 April 2026

<sup>[5]</sup> ‘Budget 2025: Militaristic fantasies fuel spending surge’, Peace Movement Aotearoa, 22 May 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/1131737118983419>

<sup>[6]</sup> ‘Defence Capability Plan 2025’, NZ Government, released 7 April 2025

<sup>[7]</sup> As outlined, for example, in ‘Budget 2025: Militaristic fantasies fuel spending surge’, note above.

<sup>[8]</sup> See, for example, ‘Urgent climate action can secure a liveable future for all’, IPCC, 20 March 2023 and ‘The world is likely to exceed a key global warming target soon. Now what? UNEP, November 2025

<sup>[9]</sup> ‘UN weather agency warns of record ‘climate imbalance’ as planetary warming accelerates’, UN News, 26 March 2026