

Welfare or Warfare

Global Day of Action on Military Spending

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Good evening ladies and gentleman, Brothers and sisters, friends,
I'd firstly like to thank Bruce for inviting me to speak today. I feel there is a moral imperative for me to add my voice to the panel of speakers because I can foresee a world of conflict unfolding before me and I feel helpless. As a woman of faith I need to stand up and be counted! As global citizens we cannot ignore the plight of others and must realise the interconnectedness of all of us.

My desire for social change and my passion for social justice come from my religious convictions as a Muslim.

It is my religion which drives me to pursue social change – to help people to get a job, to help people identify which direction to pursue for their education. My religion gives me the spiritual strength to overcome barriers and push the boundaries. My religion gives me the moral grounding and ethical conduct towards all human beings. My religion makes the tears roll down my face for the innocent victims of violence and hatred around the world. My religion makes my heart bleed for the

young children all over the world who have nothing – who have lost their homes and families because of war, or natural disasters.

My Father helped me to connect to my spirituality at a young age – through zikr – meditation. He would tell me stories about creation and the Prophets – Musa, Ibrahim, Isa and obviously the PROPHET Muhammad peace be upon him.

There is much to be learnt by focusing upon the character of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh; on his teachings, sufferings, and how he forgave even his most bitter enemies.

And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad] except as a mercy to the worlds.” (Quran: 21:106-107)

He brought to the world the teachings of underpinning principles in all aspects of life that would ensure a fair, just, productive and ethical image to societies and individuals. I am particularly inspired by the Prophet’s teachings on Social integration and responsibility.

“Feed the hungry and visit a sick person, and free the captive, if he be unjustly confined. Assist any person oppressed, whether Muslim or non-Muslim.”

My organisation, Faith Regen Foundation, is a Muslim inspired multi faith charity and it works at the grassroots level to bring diverse community groups together under the banner of sustainable development. Behind this banner, there exists an inherent belief that no matter what our background is, we all seek the same goals, and we all hold a strong desire to leave behind a better world for our future generations. From our experience it is clear that there is a vital link missing between Government and the faith sector. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of government and Faith Communities working together in partnership to build safer, integrated and cohesive communities, while still maintaining their distinct faith identities. It is these faith identities which provide a strong sense of family, belonging and community. Despite living in some of the worst conditions and most deprived areas in the UK, it is their faith that keeps their flicker of hope alive. I believe that faith sensitive public service delivery plays an important role in making this Connection. Faith based groups are embedded in, have the ear of, and often speak for their communities. They are trusted and respected. Working closely with faith based groups would enable government to build stronger foundations from which positive, confident individuals can emerge. They can help David Cameron who is trying to rediscover British values to create the Big Society.

One question I do have for Mr Cameron is - what are the ethics of warfare and how does one align interests with values? I still cannot comprehend why there is often one set of rules for some nations and another set of rules for others?

Last week, the Commons Committees on Arms Export Controls said that successive British governments have misjudged the risk that UK arms exports to nations like Libya and Bahrain would be used for internal repression. The chair of the committee, Sir John Stanley, whilst welcoming the revocation of over a hundred licences to Libya, Bahrain, Egypt, and Tunisia, said that the government needed to find a better way to reconcile its values with its need to sell arms.¹

Surely then, it cannot be right that the world's total military expenditure in 2009 amounted to \$1.53 trillion. Just 21% of this is the extra amount of money needed to achieve all MDG targets. So what does this mean in real terms - the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, universal primary education, a significant reduction in child mortality, a significant improvement in maternal health, and environmental sustainability?

Ladies and gentlemen, 'when the United Nations organisation was created at the end of the Second World War, particular responsibility for

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/committee-on-arms-export-controls/news/report-published/>

the maintenance of peace was given to the five permanent members of the Security Council. Today they are responsible for 80 per cent of the world's arms trade.²

Today, citizens all over the world are demanding answers. They would like to know why it is that global military expenditure is increasing at a time when the world is facing a number of humanitarian crises, and political upheavals. We have all witnessed on our TV screens the horrific result of the arms trade throughout the Middle East, as autocratic rulers attempt to suppress the voices of their own people through violence.

Just last month, the Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt said that, "*A global Arms Trade Treaty has the potential to prevent human rights abuses, reduce conflict and make the world a safer place*".

Though I fully support the government's push for a comprehensive Arms Trade Treaty, and am in fact a Champion of the ATT for my organisation; I would suggest that at this moment in time it may be prudent to simultaneously restrict the sale of arms to all nations until we can be

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/faith--reason-arms-trade-a-sign-of-global-moral-drift-1086227.html>

sure that those weapons will not be used to suppress the will of a people.

I would suggest that we begin to take action to better align our values with our interests. Indeed, the two should not be mutually exclusive. Playing *realpolitik* with military arms expenditure carries significant risks, as we can see today from events across the Middle East. We risk alienating large sections of the Muslim world, who become deeply suspicious of our motives. We are caught up in a situation where if we act to remove a leader who is killing his own people, it is increasingly viewed as neo-colonial imperialism. But if we stand by and do nothing, then we will not have learned the lessons from Rwanda, and Bosnia.

It is not naive to *speak* of an ethical foreign policy; an ethical foreign policy that is not just a sweeping generalisation, but follows very clear principles which is also pragmatic and consistent. It is not naive to *pursue* an ethical foreign policy either; a foreign policy which does not just suit our interests, but one that reflects a genuine desire to create a world that has its priorities in order; priorities where the Millennium Development Goals are not undermined by the arms trade. Indeed, 'every one of the MDGs is undermined by armed violence and the systematic misuse of armed force. This is true both of direct effects such as deaths by armed violence, which can leave a family without any

income, and indirect effects, such as when schools are closed, health care overburdened, or access to food or markets prevented.’³

My organisation FRF has a clear focus on welfare in the UK –and yet we are struggling to secure funding for our activities which help disadvantaged people to enter the labour market through training and skills development. Through our projects we are committed to working towards increasing social harmony in our society and we are achieving this by empowering and regenerating individuals and communities, through the vehicle of increased capacity, economic independence and a stronger voice.

With reduced expenditure on welfare the impact is felt by many of those disadvantaged people who reside in our minority faith communities. Therefore, there exists a strong case for judicious investment through faith communities. This can have a genuine, cost effective impact in ameliorating many of the most damaging effects of social exclusion and poverty.

This is not to suggest that all military expenditure must come to a halt. I concur with Oxfam when they recognise the need for countries to maintain an arms supply for legitimate causes of self-defence, and to contribute towards multilateral peace-keeping operations. However, an

³ Shooting Down the MDGs, Oxfam Briefing Paper, 2008, p. 4

ethical foreign policy is where the vested interest lies in taking moral leadership and gaining the trust and goodwill of the peoples of the world. Instead of following in the footsteps of a flawed approach to policy making which creates more enemies than friends, and more mistrust than goodwill, Britain should set the standard, and lead the way in the promotion of a principled approach to global governance. I do not speak here of a pax-Britannica, but a genuinely safe and secure world which through the Arms Trade Treaty, offers more security and fewer risks; *more* security to the world's people, and *fewer* risks of weaponry falling into disreputable hands.

There are some who dismiss an ethical and principled approach to foreign policy as a pipe dream, as wishful thinking, and a fantasy. Some say that realism should always trump idealism, and that a Kantian vision of perpetual peace needs to be tempered by realities on the ground. However, I am not here today calling for such a perpetual peace or a foreign policy based purely on either realism or idealism, but rather, an attainable level of security which takes both into account, where the result will be a thoroughly effective Arms Trade Treaty.

In 2006, David Cameron stated that "uncontrolled arms sales help to fuel brutal and destabilising conflicts around the world." He stated that "there is a profound moral imperative to ensure that the global arms trade is

governed by firm, consistent and fair rules."⁴ The moral imperative which our Prime Minister articulated is the moral imperative that I too speak of today. I therefore urge our Prime Minister to remember these choice words, and to help support and work towards the passage of a stringent and comprehensive arms trade treaty.

It is important at this stage to point out that one of the most widely used arguments in favour of the arms trade; that of job creation is a flawed one. According to Oxfam 'in economic terms, spending on arms constitutes unproductive expenditure. Economic gains believed to come from jobs and innovation in the technology sector rarely materialise, and research has shown that on the whole government spending on arms transfers represents a drain on resources'.⁵

So far from reducing the threat of armed conflict through security guarantees, the arms trade, through being allowed to go largely unchecked, is provoking and exacerbating world conflict. The MDG Africa Steering group has said that the threat of conflict threatens to reverse development gains.⁶

There is a pressing need for an effective global regulatory system that

⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/may/10/foreignpolicy.uk>

⁵ Shooting Down the MDGs, Oxfam Briefing Paper, 2008, p. 4

⁶ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dfid.gov.uk/fightingpoverty/security.asp>

will help to sustain peace and stability, whilst remaining true to our values. I believe that it is time for those with their hands on the levers of power to make a concerted and brave attempt to redefine and re-imagine the balance that needs to be struck between our principles and our actions.

I think all of us have a role to play – even if it is a small one – I for instance lead a multi faith charity with a staff workforce which reflects the diverse faith and ethnicity of the UK; it gives me as a Muslim woman the best chance of achieving the dreams of the world I aspire to for my children and future generations. I wish to contribute towards making that dream a reality where there is peace and prosperity and everyone can take their rightful place as active and respected citizens.

I truly believe that there is no way for any of us to realise the finest dreams of our faiths and the finest dreams of our political parties unless with increasing trust and understanding we work in partnership.

Finally I would like to end with a verse from the Holy Quran

Surah Al- Maaidah (5:32)

If anyone slays a human being –– it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he has saved the lives of all mankind.

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