



Uniting for Peace
INCORPORATING
Action for UN Renewal and
World Disarmament Campaign



GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION ON MILITARY SPENDING

Welfare or Warfare?

Organised by: Movement for the Abolition of War

6:30pm – 8:30pm
Tuesday, 12th April 2011

Room 10-11-12
Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

**“Disarm the Military Economy for Peace and
Development”**

Vijay Mehta
vijay@vmpeace.org
www.unitingforpeace.org

Chair: Sue Gilmurray

Other Speakers are: Husna Ahmed, John Hilary, Kate Hudson, Stuart Parkinson

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➤ INTRODUCTION

Can Warfare be transformed to Welfare or in other words can waste, violence and bloodshed be reduced and stopped for peace and development?

Wars and Military expenditure need to be reduced drastically or ultimately stopped, so that we can live as civilised human beings and work for welfare and not warfare.

According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) world military expenditure is now estimated at \$1.6 trillion. The biggest culprits or the top ten spenders in 2009 were USA [\$663 billion], China [\$98 billion], UK [\$69 billion], France [\$67 billion], Russia [\$61 billion], Germany [\$48 billion], Japan [\$46 billion], Saudi Arabia [\$39 billion], Italy [\$37 billion] and India [\$36 billion]. U.S. is still exceptionally highest in military spending and accounts for over 40% of the total.

➤ SELLING ARMS TO AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

Our own country UK is selling arms to oppressive regimes. Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have provided rich pickings for UK arms exporters. Of all the bilateral arrangements of recent years, perhaps the most despicable is the one with Libya. Colonel Gaddafi morphed from terrorist sympathiser to friend of the west, which then turned a blind eye to his internal repression. Libya is regarded as a priority partner, with the UK boasting the largest pavilion at the Libya's arms fair.

The UK arms industry descended on Abu Dhabi for IDEX 2011, the region's most important weapons fair. A tenth of all the global exhibitors are from Britain. Gerald Howarth, the minister leading the delegation, declared that "we have ambitious plans".

The most unequivocal message since the UK election was made by Peter Luff, the defence equipment minister, who told a defence show in June 2010, "There will be a very, very, very heavy ministerial commitment to arms sales. There is a sense that in the past we were rather embarrassed about exporting defence products. There is no such embarrassment in this government"

Indeed there is no. The regimes currently using brute force to put down pro-democracy protests are all longstanding partners of the UK. In 2010, equipment approved for export included teargas and crowd control ammunition, equipment for the use of aircraft cannons, assault rifles, shotguns, sniper rifles and submachine guns. No requests for licences were refused

Once again, U.S, British and other NATO forces are bombarding an Arab country with cruise missiles and bunker-busting bombs under the disguise of an UN resolution which has been twisted to appear Liberal intervention in Libya as legitimate. Both David Cameron and Barack Obama insist this is nothing like Iraq. There will be no occupation. The attack is solely to protect civilians.

Western intervention in Libya is grossly hypocritical. It's that such double standards are an integral part of a mechanism of global power and domination that stifles hopes of any credible international system of human rights protection.

➤ BREAKING THE SILENCE ON MILITARY SPENDING AND THE CONTINUATION OF WARS

On a global scale military spending is the cause of the widening gap between the rich and poor which is simply unsafe and unwise.

War is a major cause of poverty. World economy is tied up in military spending, arms trade and wars to the tune of trillions of dollars. Industrial countries are spending billions of dollars daily to advance their capacity to wage war, whilst hundreds of millions of people suffer in wretched destitution. The world's wealth and resources are being misused and the economies of the world are collapsing under unserviceable debt.

Profit motive of corporations, lack of political will and apathy among many states are some of the causes of perpetual military spending which is continually increasing owing to wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, global war on terror and now the military intervention in Libya. We witness countless billions allocated for weapons', nuclear warhead, research and development and also for secret and illegal activities of intelligence agencies like the CIA, Pentagon and MI5.

In contrast, the entire budget of the United Nations amounts to approximately 1.8% of the world's military expenditure. For \$5 billion, the lives of 6 million children under the age of 5 could be rescued each year. UNICEF's annual budget is spent on military purposes every 15 hours.

In reality, the logic of military spending has been reversed. It is not that awesome weapons are required to counter awesome threats – threats are needed to justify high tech weapons. There is no terrifying Soviet, Muslim or Martian plan to conquer the West. There is despair and anger expressed using the poor person's weapon of war – labelled “terrorism” by our own high tech terrorists – that would vanish, instantly, if Western elites stopped inventing motives and machines for attacking innocent people. But as the leftist British musician Billy Bragg once sang: “War, what is it good for? It's good for business.” The inevitable victims are the helpless billions of world's population trapped in extreme poverty.

➤ DISARMING MILITARISM FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

The present severe financial crisis is the right time for governments and parliaments to take legislative steps to adopt good policies of disarmament for development to overcome policies that endanger current and future generations. The additional benefit is, international peace and security, a prerequisite for global development

which has been elusive and hampered by the ever more dominant military industrial complex, which oversees corporate interests and financial elites prosper at the expense of almost everyone.

We need to expose drivers of military expenditure i.e. rogue traders, arms brokers, corporate and government lobbyists, military industrial complex (Pentagon, CIA, MI5 Defence Departments). We should also expose the double rhetoric of leaders and government officials and military generals who talk of bringing peace in the world while preparing for war and creating artificial fear in countries for generating demand for military hardware.

We also need to expose unnecessary tax breaks and tax incentives to the oil and banking industry despite their record profits. These initiatives given to industries which are already thriving should be deployed for education, health care and social security. Let me quote the former French Prime Minister, Pierre Messmer: “There are military secrets that translate into budgetary silences. Nowhere will you find within the military budget the possibility of precisely calculating atomic weaponry. We did this on purpose.”

Niall Ferguson said at the Aspen Ideas Festival 2010, “American Empire can suddenly collapse quite quickly due to the countries rising debt which is going to go live soon. Other Empires such as the former Soviet Union and the Roman Empire – collapsed quite quickly and the tipping point is often when the cost of servicing an Empire’s debt is larger than the cost of its defence budget. That has not been the case I think at any point in U.S. history, it will be the case in the next five years.”

In our interconnected world a future built on global military expenditure, corporate greed and injustices which has the foundations of mass poverty in the midst of plenty is economically inefficient, politically unsustainable and morally indefensible. We have to expose the double whammy of continuation of war for destroying the infrastructure of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan and then reaping profits in reconstruction.

We also need to pinpoint scandal of international trade of giving aid in return of lucrative contracts or buying arms and military hardware. We need to highlight wars which are used for plundering oil and scarce resources like diamond and cobalt from poor countries. We also need to explore how wars are continued for the sake of artificial growth of economy and for the benefits of elites to the tune of trillions of dollars.

➤ CONCLUSION

We should promote the strategy of disarmament and demilitarisation which will free up the global resources to be directed at economic, political and cultural development thus enhancing human security. The need for disarmament for development, international peace and security has been recognised in the international legal framework. However, many states have been reluctant to acknowledge its implications, let alone act on it. What it requires is governments and parliamentarians to adopt policies and take legislative steps to give the message that war is not inevitable and the notion that security lies in having and using more weaponry is false. We can get free of this evil habit to realise the peace dividend which should work on reducing conflicts, protecting human rights, promoting democracy and good governance as key ingredients to sustainable development.

The wider peace movement, civil society should work to expose the hideous continually increasing military expenditure throughout the world and demand extensive military reductions. UK should scrap the replacement of the British Trident Weapon Program, Nimrod R1 Spy Plane and the RAF's Sentinel and Tornado aircraft. Just imagine billions of dollars saving what it can achieve – closing the gap between the rich and the poor, eliminating civil wars and ethnic conflicts, fixing the financial and environmental crisis. In short let us not be reliant on selling arms and dependent on a military economy. Let us work for welfare and not warfare.

What defines us is our humanity. Let no leader or military general destroy the sacred gift of life on the planet. It is too precious. Let me finish with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. He said and I quote, *“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programmes of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom”*.

Thank you for listening.

Notes:

The following publications/websites were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI] – www.sipri.org

International Peace Bureau [IPB] – www.ipb.org

Campaign Against Arms Trade [CAAT] – www.caat.org.uk

A Climate of Peace – Vijay Mehta (Norway, 2010)

<http://www.vmpeace.org/media/documentsall/>

From Inner Peace to a Vision of Universal Peace – Vijay Mehta (India, 2011)

<http://www.vmpeace.org/media/documentsall/>

Libya Conflict Highlights NATO's Imperialist Mission – Global Network -

<http://www.truth-out.org/libya-conflict-highlights-natos-imperialist-mission68753>

Reforming and Strengthening the United Nations for the 21st Century – Uniting for Peace Newsletter [February 2011, Issue 2]

The full version of this speech can be downloaded from:

VM Centre for Peace

www.vmpeace.org

Action for UN Renewal

www.action-for-un-renewal.org.uk

Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace (www.vmpeace.org), Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity (www.fortuneforum.org), Chair of Uniting for Peace (Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign). He is an author and global activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment. Some of his notable books are The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future, Arms No More, and The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century.

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet

At present, Vijay Mehta is writing a book to be published in 2011. The subject is "Military Expenditure and its Relation to Poverty Reduction and Development."