

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Australian Section)



Media Release

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Budget Jackpot to Defence

"The Defence budget handed down after the publication of the Federal Government's Defence White Paper is excessive and irresponsible," says Rhonda Sharp, spokesperson for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). "Over the next decade, Defence will receive approximately \$308 billion under this Government."

Most Australians do not support this increased expenditure on Defence. According to figures published in *The Australian* of 15 April 2009, community support for increased spending on Defence fell from 75% in 2000 to 30% in June 2008.

"In this time of financial insecurity, Australians expect investment to meet real human needs, such as countering unemployment, improving health and education," says Professor Sharp.

"At a time when the opportunity presents itself to build trust between states in the Asia Pacific region, this excessive military spending holds the potential to instill a lack of trust and thus to contribute to an arms race in our region," said Professor Sharp.

Joel Fitzgibbon's boast on 13/5/09 that the Rudd Government will invest approximately \$30 billion over the decade "to fill the holes in the Defence budget that have been inherited from the [Howard] Government" indicates a failure to engage with contemporary realities: military security concepts and weapons profiteers bear enormous responsibility in contributing to the environmental devastation of our planet, the impoverishment of its people and the changing of our climate.

"While words such as 'security', 'terrorism' and 'people smuggling' are manipulated to leverage a reduction in civil and political rights, three potentially devastating interlocking crises remain to be faced: climate change, peak oil and an economic depression," she said.

Despite these as yet unmet real security threats, spending in this budget for major ADF operations includes 1.4 billion for Afghanistan and the wider Middle East Area; 62.2 million for operations in Iraq to protect embassy and staff; 213.8 million to East Timor; and 29 million to the Solomons.

At home, Queensland defence infrastructure will get \$537.7 million, NSW \$271.7, ACT will get \$147.2, Victoria \$250.9, Tasmania \$10.6, and SA \$267.9.

"The Rudd Government gives the budget jackpot to Defence (\$146 billion of additional funding across the life of the White Paper to 2030) when doctors and nurses in our hospitals are highly stressed, forced to use inadequate or outmoded equipment such as anaesthetic machines held together with sticky tape (a new machine costs \$79,000), and our schools and universities lag by world standards," said Professor Sharp.

"As WILPF stated in our submission to the Defence White Paper: war is counterproductive in terms of the very goals it seeks to achieve (eg Iraq): unpredictable in outcomes, hideously expensive, damaging to the environment, escalating of climate change and causing unspeakable suffering to humans, and increasingly to non-combatants.

"As a final irony, as military budgets increase, funding for the United Nations - which was created to carry out the goals of peace, global security, international cooperation and sustainable development - decreases. The \$1,339 billion spent in 2007 on militaries worldwide could fund the UN regular budget for approximately 600 years," said Professor Sharp.

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