



Australian Section

How to demilitarize global and local crisis action?

The COVID-19 global health crisis has been framed by many as a 'war' on the virus. But rather it is a health crisis which we are not well equipped to deal with. Since 2015, WILPF has been calling to "Move the Money from War to Peace", to reduce military expenditure and increased expenditure on human security and well-being. This call is proving more relevant than ever now.

In Australia we are dealing not just with the pandemic but with the suffering caused by a prolonged drought and a traumatic summer of devastating fires.

It is of significance that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was called in to assist with logistical support for fire fighters and to evacuate residents in remote coastal areas trapped on beaches by the fires. The ADF has also been called in to assist with people returning from overseas who have been required to go into quarantine, helping to police social isolation in suburban areas, and even providing support in the north-west area of Tasmania struck by a coronavirus cluster.

The military are asked to undertake these tasks because Australia has no system in place for such tasks to be undertaken by civilian organisations and the government only responds when a situation reaches crisis point. Australia has an annual defence budget of \$40 billion and has committed \$200 billion for the purchase of submarines, frigates and fighter planes. We are ranked 13th with 1.4% of global military spending (\$1.917 trillion in 2019) for just 0.3% of the global population, i.e. per capita we spend 4 times the global average.

By any standards, these are huge sums of money. Moving some of this money to civilian organisations to deal with domestic crises would be consistent with a more peaceful approach to national security, reserving the military expenditure for the defence of Australia in case of an actual external threat to our nation.

The domestic threats to our national security are here and happening now, particularly the effects of climate change – prolonged severe drought, rising temperatures, lower rainfall, intense bushfires – and now the pandemic.

Let's redirect some of our military expenditure to dealing with the domestic threats to our national security and well-being – 5% of our annual defence budget say, would be \$2 billion per year and would help meet the requirements including training, equipment and logistical support for the wide array of personnel and equipment to cope with national disasters and other emergencies,

We could even try harder to make friends with the neighbours in our region. We could try relationship building rather than military spending.

Guns and bombs don't help deal with a virus.

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