

Freeing the World from the Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction

One Billion Reasons to Disarm the Planet

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Barcelona – The world is over-armed; the world is over-hungry. This is not a new slogan – this is a proven fact showing that the world spends well over 1 trillion dollars a year on weapons, while more than one billion people are hungry.

The latest figure alone gives one billion good reasons to disarm the planet. The chances for the current scenario to change are, however, very little, if any.

Why? Because the weapons business is too commercially profitable and politically powerful – much more than governments and logic.

Here are some facts. The prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported in April 2010 that the total arms sales of the world's 100 largest arms-producing companies increased by 39 billion dollars in 2008 to reach 385 billion dollars that year.

While companies headquartered in the United States again dominate the top 100 weapons sales companies, for the first time a non-US company – BAE Systems of the United Kingdom – heads the list with the highest arms sales.

“The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued to heavily influence sales of military equipment such as armoured vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and helicopters in 2008,” SIPRI explains.

The SIPRI Top 100 arms-producing companies for 2008 contains 45 North American companies (all but one of them are U.S.-headquartered), accounting for 60 per cent of the arms sales; 34 West European companies accounting for 32 per cent of arms sales; 7 Russian companies with 3 per cent of the total; and companies from Japan, Israel, India, South Korea and Singapore.

The Western Record

This means that around 95 per cent of world's weapons sales proceed from Western self-proclaimed champions of democracy, freedom and human rights on Earth. These are the very same freedom champions that have been systematically imposing their model on the rest of the world, through so-called freedom wars.

More facts: one U.S. company – Navistar, manufacturing mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles – has increased arms sales by 960 per cent in just one year.

And a Russian company – Almaz-Antei – is among the world's 20 largest arms-producing companies for the first time.

Only 6 companies in the SIPRI Top 100 had decreased arms sales in 2008, while 13 companies increased their arms sales by more than 1 billion dollars that year and other 23 by more than 30 per cent.

Factors behind these increases include: military equipment procurement for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and increasing sales of military services, according to SIPRI.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has issued more alarming figures: spending on weapons worldwide is now well above 1 trillion dollars a year – and rising.

Disarmament?

The data was revealed by UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon who addressed the General Assembly's day-long debate on disarmament on April 19, 2010.

"The world is over-armed, and development is under-funded," Ban told the 192-member Assembly at the start of the thematic debate on disarmament and world security, and both the role of the UN and challenges for the international community.

"These priorities should be reversed. By accelerating disarmament, we can liberate the resources we need to combat climate change, address food insecurity and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)," said the secretary general.

Ban also underscored the need to tackle both weapons of mass destruction and the regulation of conventional armaments. "Small arms in the wrong hands destroy lives and livelihoods, impede peace efforts, hinder humanitarian aid, facilitate the illicit trade in narcotics and obstruct investment and development," he said.

UN General Assembly's President Ali Treki called for a successful outcome at May's five-yearly review conference of the 40-year-old Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and concrete steps towards the prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

But Treki stressed the need to deal with possible threats from the proliferation of chemical and biological materials. "It is also fundamental for the international community to seriously address the production, use, export and import of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons."

Constant Threat

According to Treki, if on the one hand, nuclear weapons have only been used once in the history of humankind, indeed with catastrophic effects, on the other hand, conventional weapons fuel conflicts every day around the world and constantly threaten international peace and security.

Moreover, the imbalance in conventional weapons capabilities "leads to threat perceptions and arms races, which in turn imperil regional and international peace and security", he warned.

Meanwhile, and building on April 13-14 nuclear security summit in Washington, Ban proposed a series of high-level conferences to flesh out efforts to prevent terrorists from getting their hands on nuclear materials.

Although the landmark International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism was adopted by the General Assembly five years ago to the day, only 65 countries – barely a third of UN Member States – have ratified it.

“This is far from satisfactory,” Ban said, while underscoring the need for accurate accounting and transparency of all stockpiles of fissile materials and for a reliable international instrument to keep their production in check.

“Without a verifiable and legally binding fissile material treaty, other efforts will amount to only half-measures,” he said, noting that he has repeatedly urged the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD) to immediately start negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Death Goes On

In spite of all calls for freeing the world from the permanent threat of weapons of mass destruction, most of them produced and sold by U.S. and western European powers, the inexorable day-to-day realities are systematically ignored.

These realities tell for instance that the one trillion dollars the world spends on weapons every single year would be more than enough to save the planet from climate change disasters, mostly caused by major arms manufacturers.

They also reveal that one of every six living persons on Earth, that’s a total of 1002 million people, either do not eat at all or are permanently hungry.

Add to that the impacting fact that only one and half dollars per person and week would be enough to feed all hungry people and eradicate hunger from the face of the Planet Earth.

No more than 44 billion dollars a year are required to feed one billion people who go hungry every year. This is only a fraction of one trillion dollars spent on weapons.

Badriya Khan is a veteran political analyst.

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