



ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

FOR GLOBAL PEACE WITH JUSTICE

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- Women of Faith for the 1,000 Days Movement
- World Council of Churches
- World Student Christian Federation – NARO

Jesus Weeps: Resisting Violence, Building Peace

Congressional Lobby Day

March 24, 2014

Our Nation can and must do more to nurture a culture of peace. We call for U.S. policies that:

- *Reduce acquisition and use of guns for purposes that cause harm;*
- *Rebalance funding priorities away from out-sized military spending to focus more resources on preventing violence and enhancing human security.*

Reduce Acquisition and Use of Guns for Purposes the Cause Harm

As people of faith, we recognize the need to curtail the escalation of violence due to the wide-spread possession and use of guns. The Media has helped us to see the tragedies of killings and injuries in schools, theaters and shopping centers. But the Media clarifies less that people are killed and maimed each day by guns on our streets and left carelessly around our homes, or used in suicide. Ecumenical Advocacy Days is not advocating that all guns be banned. Rather, ***we support legislation that will make it harder for people with hostile intentions to buy guns and easier for the community stakeholders to adequately prevent them from doing harm.****

Such legislation should include provisions that:

- Close loopholes in gun sales and trafficking laws;
- Limit the ammunition capacity and public sale of semi-automatic firearms with detachable magazines;
- Limit acquisition of guns by persons with a documented history of violence, or diagnosed with severe mental illnesses and demonstrated violent behavior;
- Collect Data on the number of deaths and injuries by guns in the U.S. (whether accident, suicide or violent intent);
- Mandate keeping guns secured in lockboxes, safes or the like;
- Support evidence-based nonviolent methods for prevention and intervention in youth violence.

Through legislation such as: Gun Show Loophole Closing Act of 2013(H.R. 141) and the Gun Trafficking Prevention Act (H.R.452/S.179); Assault Weapons Ban of 2013 (H.R. 437/S.150); Fix Gun Checks Act of 2013 (H.R. 37/S.374);Firearms Safety and Public Health Research Act of 2013 (H.R. 452) and To Require the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service to submit to Congress an Annual Report on the Effects of Gun Violence on Public Health (H.R. 2465); Secure Firearms Act of 2013(H.R.1883); Youth Promise Act (H.R.1318) or Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (S. 1307).

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Communities large and small, rural and urban, experience deaths and injuries by the harmful use of firearms. Some are horrific, all are tragic.

Our children are particularly at risk. School shootings are horrific. Yet, they are endangered in other ways:

- **Over 30% of homes with children have a gun in them, many of which are not secured.**
- **Over 1,000** American kids under age 18 died from gunshot wounds in 2010 (CDC), and over 7,000 were hospitalized from firearms injuries. On average, a child or teen is shot every hour (Yale School of Medicine)
- **85%** of children accidentally shot were shot by another child (C. Barber, Harvard School of Public Health)

Gun violence touches almost all of us, at some time

Every day well over a hundred Americans die of gun shots by accident, suicide or murder; another more than a hundred more are treated for gun injuries. The United States experiences twenty times the gun homicides than countries that are our peers in wealth and population. The data tells us that it is 22 times more likely that guns in homes are used for in domestic violence, suicide or unintentional shooting than are used in self-defense. Domestic violence incidents are significantly more likely to turn lethal in the presence of a gun.

Gun violence is costly

The effects of the use of firearms is costly – an estimated \$100 billion a year. This includes medical treatment, criminal justice proceedings, security precautions, and reductions in the quality of life. The lifetime medical cost for all gun violence victims is estimated at over \$2 billion, almost half is borne by taxpayers.

Legislation can save lives

In the sixteen states with required **background checks for all handgun sales**, fewer women are shot to death by their intimate partner, fewer kill themselves with guns, and fewer law enforcement officers are killed by handguns. In states where fingerprint-based background checks are required, even more lives are saved.

Universal Background Check legislation is supported by almost all Americans (90%), including about three of four NRA members. And, background checks are effective. About two million purchases have been blocked due to a background check – and half of these were attempts by felons to purchase a gun. Unfortunately, our current background check system only applies to about 60% of gun sales. Online sales, purchases at gun shows, personal sales do not require a background check. Background checks don't prohibit persons from purchasing a gun without reason. We need to work to protect people from the effects of gun violence.

The **Youth Promise Act** will give our communities the support and funding they need to effectively address youth violence issues. By specifically focusing on violence prevention and intervention strategies, this bill ensures we are funding programs that save lives and give every young person the opportunity to meet his or her potential. Research shows that evidenced-based prevention programs for at-risk youth greatly reduce crime and save much more than they cost. And most importantly, these programs save lives.

The Time to Act Is Now:

We have a moral responsibility to keep guns out of the hands of those who may harm others or themselves.

** Various positions are taken on gun regulation by different EAD sponsors, but the above statement is the agreed upon Congressional Ask for EAD 2014.*

Re-balance Funding Priorities from Military Spending to Human Security

Pentagon and war spending currently account for **57% of the federal discretionary budget** (all the spending that is newly appropriated each year through Congress's annual appropriations process). That means that every other priority included in the discretionary part of the budget— including education, veteran's benefits, housing and community needs, discretionary health programs, international affairs and diplomacy, energy and environment, science, transportation, food security, and many others – must vie for tiny pieces of the remaining 43%. This does not reflect our real needs or our values.

US military spending accounts for nearly half of all global military spending – the **Pentagon budget dwarfs the military budgets of the next 29 biggest spenders in the world**. The Pentagon budget nearly doubled from 1998 to 2011; yet despite the end of the war in Iraq and withdrawal from Afghanistan the military budget still remains well above pre-war spending levels. The President's budget for FY15 requests \$575 Billion for the Pentagon, far above the Cold War average and higher than any military budget under President Reagan.

Research has indicated that investing in conflict prevention is 60 times more cost effective than intervening after violence has begun. We have the opportunity to invest in a different way of leading the world, seeking relationship and community rather than living out of fear and violence, by investing in infrastructure focused on preventing violence globally and meeting the challenges of a complex world with more sophisticated tools of influence and engagement. We can, if we so choose, invest in a different way of relating and interacting with our brothers and sisters around the world. We call on Congress to support policies that will:

- **Reduce the budget allocation for the Pentagon** and increase funding for deeply underfunded aspects of human security in the U.S. and abroad, including investments in education, healthcare, sustainable jobs with living wages, eliminating hunger and extreme poverty, clean energy and policies that help those most in need to build assets.ⁱ
- **Eliminate the use of budget gimmicks** that seek to circumvent budget caps for the military budget while keeping non-military discretionary spending deeply constrained.ⁱⁱ
- **Apply the same controls to the Pentagon** that most all other areas of federal spending are subject to, including full audits to reduce waste and fraud.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Clean up Pentagon contracting** by requiring the Departments of Defense and State to conduct a review of contracts and limit contracts to three years for competitive bid contracts and one year for noncompetitive bids.^{iv}
- **Increase funding for the Complex Crises Fund**, a crucial source of flexible funding for civilian agencies that enable USAID and the State Department to undertake rapid stabilization, prevention, and crisis response activities.^v
- **Increase funding for Conflict and Stabilization Operations**, focused on preventing deadly conflict by assessing and planning an effective response to countries struggling with or at risk from protracted conflict.

ⁱThe U.S. Pentagon budget is so large it dwarfs the military budgets of the next 29 biggest spenders in the world. With only 5% of the world's population, the United States accounts for 45% (almost half) of the world's military expenditures. This is far out of balance by any measure.

As we end over a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq the military budget should be of course be reduced; yet suggestions that the Pentagon is proposing “dramatic” spending cuts in its fiscal year ‘15 budget request are wildly misleading. In fact, this spending request is larger than the fiscal year ‘14 budget that Congress passed in January. The so-called “spending cuts” are not actual cuts, but reductions from the amount the Pentagon *wanted* to spend. The FY ‘15 budget request complies with the spending levels that were set by Congress and signed into law by the President. Planned budgets for FYs ‘16-‘19 are a \$115 billion *increase* in spending above what Congress enacted into law with the Budget Control Act. Maintaining the spending caps in current law would still make this the smallest and shortest post-war decrease in spending at the Pentagon in US history.

Significant shifts from military spending to other areas of the budget are desperately needed – we cannot continue to invest in the wrong tools for the problems we face in the coming century. In May 2012, UNICEF reported that the U.S. has the second highest child poverty rate amongst developed nations. According to a 2011 study done by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Pentagon spending is the least effective federal spending tool for job creation. For every 100 jobs created by Pentagon spending, the same investment would create 251 jobs in education, 169 jobs in health care, or 147 jobs in clean energy. An F-35 can't address climate change, and we see in current crises across the globe that military intervention is the wrong tool for the job. We need robust investment in human security, diplomatic capacities, and multilateral engagement.

ⁱⁱThough some supporters of Pentagon spending are expressing alarm at supposed budget cuts, through the use of its war budget as a loophole the Pentagon avoided sequester cuts almost entirely in 2014. This fiscal year, the Pentagon is using a portion of the \$85 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), or war funding, as a "slush fund" to supplement its base budget, as well as a new "Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative". Since 2001, the United States has spent more than 1.5 trillion dollars directly on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, and the estimated total costs are over \$5 trillion. As two major wars end, the Pentagon budget should come down to prewar levels, not be boosted by a slush fund of a sort that no other department would be allowed to maintain.

ⁱⁱⁱBetween 31 and 60 billion dollars were lost to waste and fraud related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The exact figure is unknown because the Pentagon is the only federal agency that is not subject to audit. Developing a mechanism to track Pentagon spending would help find ways to make the Pentagon accountable for misspent dollars. The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is perhaps the most notable example of the Pentagon's inability to rein in costs of an inefficient weapons system. According to the Project on Government Oversight, the U.S. is going to spend \$1.5 trillion on the F-35 over the program's lifetime, and it still isn't meeting its goals. The cost of each F-35 has risen to an average of \$137 million from \$69 million in 2001. Over-budget programs like the F-35 and other troubled weapons systems contribute to the waste and bloat in the Pentagon budget.

^{iv}In spite of tough economic times, major Pentagon contractors realized substantial – even excessive – profits throughout the last decade. Spending on procurement from these contractors and others amounted to roughly a trillion dollars between 2001 and 2010. In fiscal year 2012 alone, the DoD awarded a total of \$362.4 billion in defense contracts. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has detailed billions in cost-overruns for major weapons systems. Pentagon contractors have used those record profits to pay outrageous CEO salaries and provide dividends to shareholders, not to reduce costs to the American taxpayer.

^vConflict prevention is funded at abysmally low levels. The Complex Crisis Fund would be funded at only \$30 million (that's an "m", not a "b") under the FY15 request. The FY 2014 funding level for Conflict and Stabilization Operations was \$42 million (again, these numbers are in millions). These funds together receive approximately the equivalent of *the cost overrun alone for one F-35 airplane.*

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