

ACHRS' appeal to the UN and the world for the Reduction of Military Spending and the Promotion of Peace and Development

On the international day of peace we at Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) call for an end to all protracted conflicts, and excessive military spending and war advocating. In the spirit of this year's theme, the United Nations TOGETHER campaign, we seek to ask for more funding on humanitarian relief work, and less spending on military worldwide. We seek as well to promote the respect, dignity and tolerance of the world's refugees.

In 2016, the combined countries of the world spent 1.69 trillion dollars on military expenditures. At the same time the world also saw the largest number of refugees since the Second World War, a staggering 65.6 million. The number of refugees worldwide is today bigger than the total populations of the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand combined. Of this 65.6 million, 5.3 million are Palestinian refugees registered with the UNRWA and a mere 17.2 million are registered refugees under the UNHCR mandate. Given that the military expenditures correlates to a .4% increase from 2015, it is unlikely that this global practice will cease to increase lest citizens, barring no one, resolve to overturn this trend through grass-roots efforts. During 2016 the number of worldwide refugees alone increased by an estimated 300,000, making roughly every 1 out of 100 of the world's total population a refugee. Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, seeks to encourage further militarization as demonstrated by his repeated calls for all relevant NATO member states to increase their military expenditure to 2% of their respective GDPs.

If Germany were alone in adhering to this call, their military spending would increase from \$41 billion per annum to a gargantuan \$69b. By virtue of the U.S contributing 3.6% of their GDP toward NATO, President Trump has stated that an increase in spending by all NATO partners who remain below the 2% threshold is essential to a principled budget. Meanwhile President Trump has issued a traveling ban on six major Muslim countries, counting both countries that host major numbers of refugees or are the current centers of conflicts, that clearly have had a devastating effect for the work of resettling agencies. According to the Oxfam definition and statistic, measuring the "fair share" number of asylum seekers being accepted by industrialized countries based on the size of the economy, the US has only taken in 10% of their estimated share of Syrian refugees. The estimated annual cost of US air strikes against ISIS is around 10 billion dollars; meanwhile the UN was underfunded in 2015 by 10.3 billion dollars, and as of 2017 still operates with a annual budget of only 7.7 billion dollars.

Today the largest producers of refugees are: South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria, respectively accounting for 1.4 million, 2.7 million, and 4.9 million. All three countries are victims of protracted conflicts, in Afghanistan's case even decades long. Together the three countries constitute around half the world's refugees, but this is only out of the approximately 21 million refugees that have escaped to neighboring countries. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people who are fleeing conflict but for different reasons have been forced to stay within the confines of their own country's borders. As of this moment, IDPs are amounting to almost 41 million people across the globe, 30 % of them are hosted in Africa.

As of August 2017, Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Currently, the World Health Organization has received less than half of the \$190m it requires to attend to the welfare of the Yemenis. Thus, 5000 new cases of cholera are reported with each passing day and 17 million people are in an incredibly exposed position. In spite of Saudi Arabia donating \$66m to the World Health Organization, their contribution remains both inapt and meager when compared with what is needed in aid and what has been spent on the war endeavor. In September this year the world also witnessed the flight and the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, a Muslim minority group that has inhabited the area as far back as the 12th century. Their persecution goes back years but has increased violently in the last couple of weeks and has resulted in the estimated flight of a million Rohingya across the border to Bangladesh. Despite criticism from human rights groups, several countries have been selling weapons to the Myanmar army, including China, Russia, Ukraine and Israel. The latter has been especially criticized because a private Israeli company has conducted Special Forces training for the Myanmar army in the Rahkine state, where most of the violence against the Rohingya is taking place.

The situation of refugees is generally worsened by a political climate in Europe and other parts of the West, which is skeptical and paranoid in the face of the “mass flight” from the global south to the global north. Many EU countries have refused to take in their quota of refugees, and intense debates have spurred in which definitions such as “migrant”, “asylum seeker” and “refugee” have been mixed to create confusion and insecurity. A tendency also partly reflected by the Muslim-ban issued by President Trump. Countries such as Germany, Norway and Sweden have taken a proportionally larger part of refugees in than the European average. In Germany’s case they have taken in 30 % (3.6 million) of all asylum applications across the EU. In comparison other major European countries such as the UK and France, once considered primary asylum destinations, have only received 71,000 and 39,000 asylum applications in 2015 numbers. The closing of the European borders is most heavily felt by the refugees in the Mediterranean, where 2016 witnessed the most deadly year yet. Across the ocean stretching from Libya to Italy, crooked human smugglers sell low quality vessels that hardly can contain the large number of refugees, resulting in several tragic incidents and the deaths. According to the Missing Migrants Project the fatalities of 2016 were 5,582 and 2017 is numbering 3,781 so far. There is currently little evidence that the present stream of refugees will decline in the face of protracting conflicts.

As of June this year, the UNOCHA reported that a meager \$3.5 billion of the \$23.5 billion required had been allocating to the humanitarian effort. It is clearly shown, that the governments of the world by far favors military spending above humanitarian relief. Yemen is just one active example of a man made catastrophe which continues to be virtually ignored by states who advocate allocating funds to the war machine, as opposed to the peace apparatus. In that respect, it is necessary for all humans to endorse peace by opposing the war machines of our states, which freely cultivates man made catastrophes that prey on those without a voice. Recently President Trump has also stated a series of threats towards the North Korean government, trying to prevent them from furthering their nuclear program, which has created enormous tension on the Korean peninsula with the chance of nuclear war. President Trump’s statement contains harsh and exacerbating rhetoric, to which the totalitarian North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has respond with equally apocalyptic threats. We want to appeal to the citizen of the of the world not to put power in the hands of war advocates, and to spend the necessary means, not on war effort,

but on humanitarian relief, Health services, the environment and the elimination of poverty instead. At the same time we need to promote tolerance and peace, but also understand the basic premise of the vast number of refugees that currently seeks shelter; that is the human right to live in peace and without prosecution.

We at the ACHRS strongly apply, on this international day for peace, to the UN to take the following steps:

- 1) To adopt a resolution fixed with an action plan that seeks to a total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction all over the world, especially chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.
- 2) To adopt a resolution that will enforce each country of the international community to decrease their military budget by a 10 % pr. annum. We would also apply to the UN to secure that the 10 % budget decrease will be allocated to A) humanitarian relief work and the better treatment of refugees worldwide. B) Better health service in general, to raise the average life expectancy in the world. C) Development of third world countries. D) To combat the effects of climate change and reduce further changes to the environment.
- 3) We would like also to appeal to the UN General Secretary, Mr. António Guterres, to put further effort into mediating and solving the many regional crisis and conflicts we see today, in order to secure peace in the world.

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