Freeze Weapons: The need for a moratorium on the production, trade and supply of weapons to fund healthcare

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Propelled by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus globally, the SCRAP Weapons team at SOAS University of London is building on the United Nations Secretary General’s call for a Global Ceasefire in all corners of the world. As a complementary measure to the call, SCRAP is calling on all States and corporations to completely freeze the production and supply of Weapons by harnessing their capabilities to divert military modernization, procurement and operational budgets to [fight] bolster efforts towards eradicating Covid-19.

Why focus on arms expenditure?
The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed that governments all over the world have failed to sufficiently invest in public health infrastructure to face such a crisis. Every year, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) publishes global military spending figures, as well as those of the international trade in conventional Armaments. More than $1.9 trillion was spent on militaries and their equipment in 2019, amounting to roughly to 863 times the 2019 budget of the World Health Organisation. This is vastly disproportionate with contemporary sources of national and human insecurity, especially now that we face the threat of Covid-19. Not only is much of this spending economically unproductive, but excessive military spending by one nation also multiplies throughout the international system, prompting excessive spending globally.

Meanwhile, extensive research into military spending has proven that higher military spending negatively impacts health expenditures [ref.1] and therefore is an important risk factor for population health and individual wellbeing - demonstrating that a 1% increase in military spending results in a 0.62% decrease in health spending in developed countries, and a 0.962% decrease in health spending in developing countries. This is why some NGOs and humanitarian groups continue to point out that the annual spend on nuclear weapons in the United States ($35.1 billion) could pay for 300,000 intensive care unit beds, 35,000 ventilators, 150,000 nurses or 75,000 doctors.

Why a moratorium?
A moratorium in international law is a suspension or postponement of normal practice. Generally, a moratorium is established either by legally binding agreement or international resolutions, or by non-binding unilateral or collective declarations. Moratoriums have the effect of freezing the status quo or banning specific activities.

The amount spent on militaries globally in 2019 was 863 times more than the WHO annual budget
Moratoriums have a record of past success, notably in the UN General Assembly Resolutions - “A Path to the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons”, where “a moratorium on nuclear-weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosions” was treated as a practical step for the “systematic and progressive efforts” to implement the NPT, and the creation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test–Ban Treaty (CTBT).

What are the implications of the weapons freeze?
While there may not be a simple solution to the eradication of the coronavirus, there is clear room for improvement and continued innovation in a number of areas, and a freeze on weapons production, trade and supply is one of them. A freeze on weapons production and supply can free resources for the global medical effort, and the Sustainable Development Goals strategy for human security.
A weapons freeze could help the world to transform economies in a manner that will result in greater investment in health, safety and social security, in existing institutions and in new mechanisms, that protect public goods, address humanitarian needs and strengthen international cooperation and leadership to address the common threats to human security.

A 1% increase in global military spending results 0.962% decrease in health spending in developing countries

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PHOTO: Anita Dube, a health worker, in action at the Mpilo Central Hospital Covid19 Testing laboratory. Bulawayo, 25 April 2020. © KB Mpofu / ILO (Flickr)
Annex

- **UNIT PRICE:** 89 $MILLION
  
  **COMBAT AIRCRAFT F-35**

- **UNIT PRICE:** 3,244
  
  **ICU BEDS**
  
  **PRICE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE:** $350

- **UNIT PRICE:** 31 $MILLION
  
  **TRIDENT MISSILE**
  
  **WITH NUCLEAR WARHEAD CAPACITY**

- **UNIT PRICE:** 17,000,000
  
  **FACE MASKS**
  
  **UNIT PRICE:** $0.82

- **UNIT PRICE:** $44,000
  
  **RUNNING COST PER HOUR**

  **COMBAT AIRCRAFT F-35**

- **UNIT PRICE:** 11 $MILLION
  
  **ANNUAL GROSS SALARY**

  **NURSE IN HOSPITAL**

  $42,000 (INCDI)

- **UNIT PRICE:** 440
  
  **VENTILATORS**
  
  **UNIT PRICE:** $25,000

- **UNIT PRICE:** 2,800 $MILLION
  
  **VIRGINIA CLASS SUBMARINE**

- **UNIT PRICE:** 9,180
  
  **FULLY EQUIPPED AMBULANCES**
  
  **UNIT PRICE:** $10,000

- **ONE SHOT PRICE:** $3,200
  
  **LEOPARD 2E BATTLE TANK**

- **UNIT PRICE:** 90
  
  **COVID-19 TESTS**
  
  **UNIT PRICE FOR CDC USA:** $56