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# The UN Pact for the Future: Nuclear weapons spending and the Sustainable Development Goals in a turbulent world

**Submission to the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) in response to the UNODA Call for Papers on the impact of the global increase in military expenditure on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals**

*Submitted by: Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, Basel Peace Office, Citizens for Global Solutions, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Peace and Disarmament Collective Aotearoa, UNFOLD ZERO, World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy, World Future Council and Youth Fusion*

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## Summary

The increase in international tensions and armed conflicts has led to a corresponding increase in spending on conventional and nuclear weapons, with negative repercussions for most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including diminished investment in the SDGs. In order to reverse the trend on conventional weapons spending, greater emphasis will be needed on conflict resolution, common security and the rule of law. Spending on nuclear weapons, however, could be cut by significant amounts regardless of current international tensions. Indeed, in Action 25 of the *Pact for the Future* adopted in September last year, UN Member States re-affirmed their commitment to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Nuclear armed and allied states should end spending on new nuclear weapons and adopt a time-bound goal to achieve nuclear abolition by the end of the next SDG cycle (2045). This would help reduce global tensions, build common security and free up further resources for the SDGs. Additional recommendations to help implement this are proposed in this submission.

## Submission

The past few years have witnessed an increase in the number, intensity and impact of conflicts between and within States, including full scale invasions by Russia against Ukraine and by Israel against Gaza. This has led to an increase in spending on both conventional and nuclear weapons, as well as increased threats of nuclear war.

Such spending decreases the resources available for investing in the Sustainable Development Goals. The Institute of Economics and Peace has estimated that the economic impact of violence has risen to US\$19.1 trillion annually, which is 13.5% of the world's Gross Domestic Product or the equivalent of US\$2,380 per person.<sup>1</sup> This is more than four times the amount required to meet the UN estimated funding gap for SDG implementation of US\$4.3 trillion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Global Peace Index 2024](#), Chapter 3: The Economic Impact of Violence, Institute for Economics and Peace, June 2024.

<sup>2</sup> [Financing for development: Reforming global systems to drive progress](#), UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), February 27, 2025

In addition, armed conflict impacts negatively on human health, public services and infrastructure, democratic engagement, human rights and the environment. The rise in armed conflict has already reversed many of the gains that have been made toward implementing the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>

As long as such wars are raging and tensions between states remain high, it will be difficult to convince governments to reduce spending on conventional weapons. Peace, conflict resolution and advancing the rule of law between states will be vital to reduce armed conflict, build trust and reduce military expenditures.

This applies to some degree to nuclear weapons budgets. In times of high tension and conflicts involving nuclear-armed countries, it would be unrealistic to expect these States to relinquish nuclear deterrence and abolish all nuclear weapons. However, even in such difficult political times, significant reductions in nuclear weapons spending could be undertaken. This is because current nuclear weapons stockpiles and management programs, collectively costing over \$100 billion per year<sup>4</sup>, reach far beyond the nuclear weapons capabilities required for simple nuclear deterrence. United States President Trump alluded to this on February 13, 2025 when he remarked from the Oval Office that *“There’s no reason for us to be building brand-new nuclear weapons. We already have so many. You could destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over. And here we are building new nuclear weapons, and they’re building nuclear weapons.”*<sup>5</sup>

The [Hastening Arms Limitation Talks Act](#), introduced in the U.S. Congress by Senator Ed Markey (Co-President of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament) outlines a legislative process for ending the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and re-allocating budgets from these activities to better purposes (consistent with the SDGs).<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the UN Human Rights Committee have confirmed that there is a universal obligation under international law to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons. As such, nuclear armed and allied States are required under international law to develop alternatives to nuclear deterrence to ensure their security.

The UN Charter provides a common security framework for such alternatives. This includes obligations under Article 2 of the Charter for Member States to resolve their international conflicts through peaceful means, as well as an outline in Article 36 of the Charter of the array of approaches and mechanisms that Member States can use to do so.

One of the most important of these mechanisms is the ICJ, which was established under the UN Charter to assist Member States resolve their international conflicts peacefully through the rule of law. The ICJ has had considerable success in doing so<sup>7</sup>, but is hampered in this role by the relative lack of acceptance of its compulsory jurisdiction – with only 74 countries currently accepting such jurisdiction. The UN Secretary-General has therefore called on all UN Member States to accept ICJ

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<sup>3</sup> See [The impacts of armed conflict on human development: A review of the literature](#), World Development 187 (2025)

<sup>4</sup> See [How much do the nuclear weapon states spend on nuclear weapons?](#), Move the Nuclear Weapons Money, December 21, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See [Trump proposes nuclear deal with Russia and China to halve defense budgets](#), The Guardian, February 13, 2025

<sup>6</sup> See [PNND Co-President Senator Markey announces legislation to HALT the global nuclear arms race](#), PNND, June 23, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> See [ICJ Success Stories](#), UNFOLD ZERO, June 2024.

jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup> A global civil society campaign, Legal Alternatives to War (LAW not War)<sup>9</sup>, and a likeminded group of countries<sup>10</sup> aim to help achieve this goal of universal acceptance of ICJ jurisdiction.

**The organizations making this submission therefore call on UN Member States (particularly nuclear armed and allied States) to:**

1. Re-affirm the obligation to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons, and commit to achieve this by the end of the next SDG cycle (i.e. by 2045, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations).<sup>11</sup>
2. Adopt no-first-use<sup>12</sup> and other minimal nuclear deterrence policies<sup>13</sup> as the first step towards preventing nuclear war and limiting nuclear weapons systems to only those relevant to this purpose.
3. Commence negotiations for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons under strict international control.<sup>14</sup>
4. End the production of new nuclear weapons - thus eliminating the budgets for new nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons budgets would be limited to management of current weapons, destruction of surplus weapons and destruction of all nuclear weapons under a negotiated nuclear abolition agreement. Resources saved should be allocated to SDGs.<sup>15</sup>
5. Non-nuclear States to end all public investments in nuclear weapons corporations, especially those that are parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).<sup>16</sup>
6. Replace nuclear deterrence with common security<sup>17</sup>, including through universal acceptance of the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

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<sup>8</sup> See UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Remarks to the UN Security Council Thematic Debate on the Rule of Law amongst Nations, January 12, 2023: *“From the smallest village to the global stage, the rule of law is all that stands between peace and stability and a brutal struggle for power and resources. I note the importance of accepting the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court and call on all Member States to do so without any reservations.”*

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.unfoldzero.org/law-not-war/>

<sup>10</sup> See the [Declaration on promoting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice](#), endorsed by 33 countries

<sup>11</sup> This call is in the [Protect People and the Planet: Appeal for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World](#) (2020) as well as in [Pursuing Peace, Security and Nuclear Disarmament through our Common Humanity](#), a joint inter-faith and values appeal to the 2024 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee Meeting (NPT Prep Com), and in [Turn Back the Doomsday Clock](#), a parliamentary appeal to the 2024 NPT Prep Com.

<sup>12</sup> Support for the adoption of no-first-use policies gained considerable traction at the 2023 NPT Prep Com. See [NPT States parties call for No-First-Use policies](#). China has now submitted a [proposal for a no-first-use agreement between the P5 countries](#).

<sup>13</sup> Minimal nuclear deterrence policies would affirm that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack, limit the number of nuclear weapons in the stockpile to what is required to deter such attack, affirm that the country would never launch a nuclear war (no-first-use), and de-alert nuclear weapons operating systems to remove the threat of first strike.

<sup>14</sup> Options for a negotiated framework on the elimination of nuclear weapons are outlined in [Frameworks for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World](#), a working paper submitted by Abolition 2000 to the 2023 Preparatory Meeting for the 11th NPT Review Conference. One of those options – negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention – gained considerable traction at the 2024 NPT Prep Com. See [2024 NPT Chair’s summary reveals renewed interest in a Nuclear Weapons Convention](#);

<sup>15</sup> See [Opportunity costs of nuclear-weapons programs](#) for a visual and financial overview of SDGs that could be supported by budgets reallocated from nuclear weapons spending, and the level of impact of such potential reallocations. Retrieved from [Move the Nuclear Weapons Money](#), March 20, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Public investments in nuclear weapons corporations have been ended/prohibited by a number of governments (either through executive or parliamentary action) including Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland. States parties to the TPNW are encouraged to follow these examples, even though financing of nuclear weapons is not specifically prohibited under the treaty.

<sup>17</sup> See [Common Security v. Nuclear Weapons: How to replace the current reliance on nuclear deterrence with sustainable security for all](#), a statement to the 2023 NPT Prep Com, endorsed by over 160 organizations.

## ANNEX I: ABOUT THE SUBMITTING ORGANIZATIONS

### **Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace:** [www.facebook.com/nzpeacelaw](https://www.facebook.com/nzpeacelaw), [www.unfoldzero.org](http://www.unfoldzero.org)

Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace (ALP) is an organization of lawyers and law students from Aotearoa (New Zealand) working to abolish nuclear weapons, increase respect for international law and abolish war. ALP is the New Zealand affiliate of the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, and is a founding partner of UNFOLD ZERO, which promotes United Nations initiatives for nuclear disarmament.

### **Basel Peace Office:** [www.baselpeaceoffice.org](http://www.baselpeaceoffice.org)

Basel Peace Office (BPO) is a coalition established by five Swiss and four international organizations to advance the peace and security of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Basel Peace Office makes connections between inter-related issues - including peace, the climate, nuclear disarmament, human rights and sustainable development - and builds cooperation amongst key constituencies including mayors, parliamentarians, religious leaders, academics, youth/students, women, lawyers, medical professionals, government officials and UN entities. BPO is a member of the EU Non-proliferation Consortium and serves as the Basel representative in Mayors for Peace.

### **Citizens for Global Solutions:** [www.globalsolutions.org](http://www.globalsolutions.org)

CGS is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan membership-based organization that for more than 75 years has brought together a diverse collective of individuals and organizations with a common goal of a unified world predicated upon peace, human rights, and the rule of law. From championing ratification of the UN Charter upon its establishment in 1947, to supporting the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) 25 years ago, to advocating for global instruments to confront today's enduring challenges of war and climate degradation.

### **Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament:** [www.pnnd.org](http://www.pnnd.org)

Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND) is a global network of legislators from nuclear-armed, nuclear-allied and non-nuclear States working to prevent nuclear proliferation, reduce the risks of nuclear war, and advance the peace and security of a nuclear-weapons-free world. PNND is a permanent observer at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (180 member parliaments) and works in cooperation with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs. PNND is a cofounder of a number of platforms and initiatives including [UNFOLD ZERO](#) and the [Move the Nuclear Weapon Money Campaign](#).

### **Peace and Disarmament Collective Aotearoa**

The Peace and Disarmament Collective Aotearoa (PADCA) is a national collective of experts and representatives from peace and disarmament organizations in Aotearoa-New Zealand. PADCA reviews current developments across an array of peace and disarmament issues, builds cooperation amongst NZ peace and disarmament organizations and makes policy recommendations to government. Several PADCA members are either current or former members of the Public Advisory Board on Disarmament and Arms Control, established by the government to advise on peace and disarmament issues.

### **UNFOLD ZERO:** [www.unfoldzero.org](http://www.unfoldzero.org)

UNFOLD ZERO is a coalition of seven international organizations established to promote United Nations (UN) focused initiatives and actions for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. UNFOLD ZERO focuses on initiatives and actions in the UN General Assembly, International Court of Justice, Human Rights Council, UN Security Council, Conference on Disarmament and Economic and Social Council, relevant treaty bodies hosted by the UN (such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) and the role of the UN Secretary-General.

### **World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy:** [www.wfm-igp.org](http://www.wfm-igp.org)

World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP) is a global coalition of organizations working for better global governance with the vision of a world federalist system, in order to prevent war, ensure universal adherence to international law, protect human rights, advance global democracy and protect the environment. WFM-IGP established the Coalition for an International Criminal Court, which was instrumental in the campaign to establish an International Criminal Court. More recently, WFM-IGP has co-launched [Legal Alternatives to War](#) (LAW not War) and [Mobilizing an Earth Governance Alliance](#).

### **World Future Council:** [www.worldfuturecouncil.org](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org)

The World Future Council (WFC) was established to promote effective policies to ensure a peaceful and sustainable future. WFC consists of 50 eminent global change-makers from governments, parliaments, civil society, academia, the arts and business who have already successfully created change. They are supported by a staff of experts that work with the councillors to identify, develop, highlight and spreading effective, future-just solutions for current challenges humanity is facing.

### **Youth Fusion:** [www.youth-fusion.org](http://www.youth-fusion.org)

**Youth Fusion** is a world-wide networking platform for young individuals and organizations in the field of nuclear disarmament, risk-reduction and non-proliferation. Youth Fusion focuses on youth action and intergenerational dialogue, building on the links between disarmament, peace, climate action, human rights, public health and sustainable development. Youth Fusion serves as the youth section of [Abolition 2000](#), the global civil society network to eliminate nuclear weapons.