

## Media Release

Thursday 24 October 2024

**Armed with Love** – This Disarmament Week lay down your weapons and arm yourself with the weapons of love: prayer and fasting.

There were two prominent emotions when writing this statement. The first was despair, the deep epitome of the absence of hope. How do you approach the subject of peace and disarmament when over 120 million people have been forcibly displaced by war, conflict and violence in 2024?<sup>1</sup>

The second emotion was desperation. As the Israel-Hamas war enters its second deadly year, and the Russo-Ukraine war continues after a decade of conflict, how many times must we call for global ceasefire and disarmament? Will Ukraine and the Middle East ever live to see peace?

It is easy for us in this country to change the channel while watching television, change the station on the radio, hide stories in our news feeds or turn the page of a newspaper, than it is to bear witness to the atrocities in other countries, on distant shores, or watch cataclysmic damage, decimation and loss of life in cities, towns, villages, hospitals, schools or marketplaces thousands of kilometres away.

We are comfortable with ignorance because many believe ignorance will keep us safe. Keeping our families, children, neighbours, colleagues, and all within our proximate little circle safe in a visionless and soundless bubble where the pain of the world cannot penetrate. Some believe this artificial void to be peace.

In his letter to Catholics and Christians in the Middle East earlier this month, Pope Francis stated that ‘people today do not know how to find peace’.<sup>2</sup> That as Christians, we must never tire of imploring peace from God. He further explains that the weapons of love that change history are prayer and fasting. In this overly weaponised world, it is the weapons of love that can defeat our one true enemy – ‘the spirit of evil that foments war.’

Could the solution to war be that simple? It isn’t often that prayer and fasting are defined as weapons, let alone the weapon of choice to combat the ‘evil that foments war.’ Yet, we are increasingly aware that the pattern of war is repeated throughout history. Could our prayer and fasting break the repetitive cycle of war and change the course of history?

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<sup>1</sup> Burke, K. (2024, 13 June). *Record 120 million people displaced globally — UN report*. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/record-120-million-people-displaced-globally-in-2024-un-report/a-69348370#:~:text=A%20UN%20report%20reveals%20that,1.5%25%20of%20the%20world's%20population>.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis. (2024, October 7). *Letter of Pope Francis to Catholics in the Middle East, 07.10.2024*. Vaticana. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/10/07/241007b.html>

Some will claim that peace will never be achievable if there is profit in war, conflict and arms transfers<sup>3</sup>. The estimated global military expenditure of \$2.443 trillion last year was the highest ever worldwide military expenditure recorded amid war, rising tension and insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Has our humanity, human dignity and value for human life been reduced to mere market value? Worse still, is peace being held ransom by military expenditure?

The Catholic Bishops of Aotearoa, New Zealand, uphold the Church's teaching on wealth where billions of dollars a year is spent on defence systems and weapons of war, which should, in justice, be spent on the needs of the dispossessed and the poor.<sup>5</sup> This joins the chorus of Oceanian Catholic Bishops who "regard the arms race, which constitutes a significant proportion of the world's economy, as outright theft from the poor of the world who have to go without."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, can the efforts of peacekeeping become as profitable as war? Some would argue that there is profit in peace,<sup>7</sup> while others, especially those caught in the crossfire of wilful and wasteful loss of life, and the devastation to land and environment through acts of warfare, may argue that peace and life cannot wait for speculated profit.

We need peace now.

It is those who are well armed that will ultimately win the battle, but at what cost will the war be won? We repeat our call this Disarmament Week to lay down your weapons of destruction and death and rearm yourself with the weapons of love through prayer and fasting for world peace. If we must bear arms, choose the weapons of love that will enable lasting and historic peace.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Jn 14:26-27

***I runga i te tika me te rangimarie | In justice and peace.***

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Issued on behalf of Bishop Steve Lowe's Justice and Peace Commission, Catholic Diocese of Auckland.

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Executive Secretary

Justice and Peace Commission | Te Komihana Rongomau, Paetika

Catholic Diocese of Auckland | Te Taumata o te Hahi Katorika

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<sup>3</sup> Wezeman, P.D., Djokic, K., George, M., Hussain, Z., & Wezeman, S.T. (2024 March). *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023*. SIPRI. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs\\_2403\\_at\\_2023.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> SIPRI. (2024, April 22). *Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity*. <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity> (other refs: <https://www.sipri.org/>)

<sup>5</sup> New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. (2023, October 8). *Consistent Ethic of Life*.

<https://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Consistent-Ethic-of-Life-booklet-26-September-2023.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Quoting Federation of Catholic Bishops of Oceania. (1995). Nuclear testing in the Pacific.

<sup>7</sup> University of North Texas. (n.d.). *Is peace profitable?* <https://www.unt.edu/story/peace-profitable.html#skip>