

BRUSSELS - At the conclusion of an expert consultation convened by the Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order in Brussels on 15 May and attended by senior representatives of several organizations including NATO, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Transparency International, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the International Peace Bureau (IPB), the Bonn International Conversion Center (BICC), the Group for Research and Information for Peace (GRIP), the Quaker Council for European Affairs and the Flemish Peace Institute, the Independent Expert, Alfred de Zayas, called for increased transparency on military expenditure:

“Since a democratic and equitable international order requires peace, States must engage in good faith negotiations for disarmament and significantly reduce military expenditure and the arms trade. While States frequently give lip service to disarmament and some progress could be observed, considerable efforts should still be made to reduce military spending. There is a general lack of transparency with regard to military budgets worldwide. Governments are reluctant to come forward with detailed information and statistics on military expenditures. Insufficient attention is devoted to these issues by the media, as if such matters were taboo. There is also scarce public participation in the determination of budget priorities. Powerful lobbies, including the military-industrial complex, weigh heavily on parliaments and governments and impose priorities that have no democratic legitimacy.

In order to remedy this situation, States should proactively inform their citizens concerning past, present and future military expenditure and engage the public in a debate on budget priorities. Good practices in combatting corruption and increasing transparency should be promoted. Moreover, the culture of fear that is advanced in some countries to justify the need for more sophisticated and extremely expensive weapons should be combatted.

States should henceforth report to the Human Rights Council on military expenditure, not only on the production and stockpiling of weapons, personnel and military bases abroad, but also on military-related research, including research into nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure would be an appropriate forum to discuss a shift away from the “military first” approach prevalent in many countries towards the promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. States should report to the UPR on the percentage of the national budget used for all military-related expenditure (including slush funds) and contrast it against the percentage of the budget devoted for the administration of justice, education and health care.

Disarmament would help free resources necessary for sustainable development. Financial

resources released through disarmament and downscaling of the military should be used to retrain personnel and to promote development of peaceful industries domestically and internationally.”

ENDS

Alfred de Zayas (United States of America) was appointed as the first Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order by the Human Rights Council, effective May 2012. He is currently professor of international law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. Mr. de Zayas practiced corporate law and family law in New York and Florida. As a Human Rights Council’s mandate holder, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IntOrder/Pages/IEInternationalorderIndex.aspx>

Check the 2013 report to the UN General Assembly by the Independent Expert: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IntOrder/A-68-284_en.pdf

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