Building Pressure to Change: Overview

The second annual Global Day of Action on Military Spending took place on April 17, 2012 in more than 40 countries. Over 140 events were held on nearly every continent. The day was endorsed by the United Nations, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias issued a special video message to encourage participation. GDAMS attracted media coverage all over the world.

GDAMS 2.0 coincided with the release of global military expenditure data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. It also took place on Tax Day in the United States, where dozens of actions united the peace movement with economic justice activists around a common message: cut the military budget and support human needs.

Co-organized by the International Peace Bureau in Geneva, Switzerland and the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, GDAMS relied on a range of networks, NGOs, and popular organizations throughout the world. This second annual event boasted more people, more events, and more participating countries than the inaugural event, generating greater interest in planning early for GDAMS 3.0.

Preparation Work

A Global Day of Action requires careful planning. The preparatory work undertaken by the two convening groups included convening an International Steering Committee; distributing background materials and facilitating access to SIPRI’s advance documentation; maintaining the website www.demilitarize.org; compiling a special video based on clips from the first year’s actions around the world; publishing a set of posters for campaigners to use in their localities; distributing newsletters; and an ongoing process of contact with both new and previous partners on all continents.
The Actions

As in 2011, the actions that took place around the world on the Global Day of Action were united in message but diverse in presentation. There were panel discussions, street performances, leafleting campaigns, name-and-shame exercises, village rallies, videos, petitions, and much more. All these various events highlighted the latest totals for global military expenditure: more than $1.7 trillion for 2011. Because GDAMS coincides with the SIPRI data release, we encouraged all participants to think of photo-friendly events to generate pictures to accompany media stories about global military spending. Our website, http://www.demilitarize.org, is full of these pictures. But here is a sampling.

In Geneva, a high-level panel entitled The Human Cost of Military Spending was held in the chamber of the Conference on Disarmament at the United Nations. Speakers included the Director-General of the UN in Geneva, the President of the Conference on Disarmament, and representatives of IPB and SIPRI. Later the same day, GDAMS activists created two photo opportunities. In the first, balloons showed the gap between global military spending (represented by 150 black balloons) and what is needed to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals (30 colored balloons). In the second, a large map showed the top 15 military spenders in the world.

Activists displayed a large banner and asked passers-by to sign the Rio Appeal. This Appeal will be presented to the delegates at the Rio+20 Summit. Supported by many Nobel Laureates, distinguished personalities, and international organizations, we ask for a plan for disarmament and a reduction of 10% of global military expenditure as well as for the creation of an international fund to finance development projects.

In Zurich, a street theater performance pitted activists wrapped in national flags to symbolize states that are being squeezed by excessive military spending up against two fat soldiers who illustrated the absurd “devouring” of tax money by the armies. In London, another street theater performance brought together Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and Hosni Mubarak with Business Secretary Vince Cable outside the department of Business, Innovation, and Skills, the latter quite happily taking money from them in exchange for weapons.

In the Asia-Pacific region, many actions focused on opposition to military spending associated with military bases, especially as the U.S. shifts military resources into the region. Anti-base protests in four cities in Okinawa and in Nagoya focused on the amount of money Japan spends on supporting U.S. military bases on the island. A prayer rally in Tokyo focused opposition to the money Japan spends on its own military budget through the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces. In Seoul, meanwhile, South Korean activists created street theater focused on the military spending associated with the construction of a naval base on Jeju Island. In Brisbane, activists similarly focused on the expansion of the naval base in nearby Darwin. As part of the campaign, organizers also wrote to parents asking them to take action by calling for more funding for schools and less for preparing for war.
In the United States, activists organized name-and-shame events in front of military contracting firms: In Tucson, Arizona, members of the Raytheon Peacemakers group got up early and, as workers arrived at Raytheon Missile Systems, gathered for a peace vigil outside the missile factory. And Occupy activists teamed up with other local groups to protest Boeing in Los Angeles and General Electric in Boston. In Washington, DC, a spirited crowd did a Walk of Shame to call out seven members of the Military Industrial Complex near the White House, before finishing at Freedom Plaza for peace and justice-themed poems by slam poets.

And elsewhere around the world, the variety of creative actions was rich. Activists went out onto the streets in Nairobi to demand the withdrawal of Kenyan forces from Somalia. Sit-in protesters occupied the space outside the Colosseum in Rome. Rallies took place in five different villages in Rajasthan. Leafleting took place in Athens, Gothenburg, three cities in New Zealand, and New Delhi. Activists gathered signatures for arms-reduction petitions in Nancy and Barcelona. Panel discussions took place in Oslo, Kuala Lumpur, Kerala, and Dhaka, bringing parliamentarians into conversation with NGOs and activists. Latin American activists brought the issue of military spending to the People’s Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, which took place just prior to GDAMS. An open-air press conference took place in Istanbul. To register protest at the share of tax dollars going to the military, activists set up powerful visuals outside U.S. post offices in Honolulu, New York, and Bristol, Rhode Island.

Finally, among the most remarkable actions was a one-man hunger strike in Pakistan: veteran activist Raja Jahangir Akhtar fasted for 4 days in protest of the high level of military spending in his country. Just days later, the Pakistani Army Chief, deeply affected by the tragedy of soldiers buried in an avalanche, himself advocated reductions in defense spending and new investments in the social sector.

**The Impact**

Media coverage for GDAMS 2.0 was extensive. In the United States, we published articles about GDAMS in Huffington Post and Foreign Policy In Focus (Arms Down), and in Inter Press Service (Asia Is Up in Arms). Our McClatchy op-ed (Death and Taxes) appeared throughout the United States, including the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Detroit News, the Desert News in Salt Lake City, and the Gainesville Sun in Florida. Yahoo! News also mentioned GDAMS in a story about Tax-Day protests in the United States. Internationally, stories about GDAMS appeared in numerous outlets, including Open Democracy (England), ABC, SBS (Australia), the Tribune de Genève, the Express Tribune (Pakistan), the UN News Centre, Free Malaysia Today, Alternatives Internationales’ blog, and in In2EastAfrica. The video of Nobel laureate Oscar Aria was widely distributed on the web, attracting several thousand views.

Several Spanish NGOs launched a [website](#) comparing cuts in the social sector with military spending. This website also collects signatures to urge the government to reduce its investments in the defense sector. Activists spent the day lobbying as well. Malaysian participants presented their demands directly to the Prime Minister. In Philadelphia, activists supported a city council resolution entitled “Redirect Military Spending, Fund Our Communities.”
Follow Up

GDAMS has an international steering committee that has already begun planning for the 2013 edition. Discussion is also under way on how to ensure that the GDAMS campaign becomes an all-year affair. None of the campaigners involved is under any illusion that the changes we seek will come quickly. On the other hand, the economic crisis is forcing greater scrutiny of public spending than ever before, and some reductions in military budgets are already visible. What is needed, however, is a worldwide movement strong enough to make radical changes in priorities inevitable.
For more information check out:
http://www.demilitarize.org
Institute for Policy Studies  http://www.ips-dc.org/
International Peace Bureau  http://www.ipb.org/web/

https://www.facebook.com/groups/100733129991763/
twitter.com/demilitarizeday