

**On the Global Day of Action on Military Spending  
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**By**

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As we approach the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, we continue to face the harsh reality that the greatest barrier to progress remains a lack of resources. As a result, millions still languish in extreme poverty more than a decade into the new millennium.

Meanwhile, global military spending last year remained at 1.75 trillion US dollars,<sup>1</sup> more than a dozen times what the world spent on official development assistance.<sup>2</sup>

States have a sovereign right to self-defence, as enshrined in the UN Charter, and this necessarily includes the right to decide the adequate size of their military and military spending. Yet the Charter also provides that Member States should promote international peace and security “with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources”. It is difficult indeed to reconcile current rates of military spending with this solemn principle. Too many leaders still consider military prowess their main tool for conveying national strength.

In our world, a country’s sustained competitiveness is increasingly based not on forceful coercion but on connectivity, creativity and co-option. National governments perform well if they are able to provide their citizens with meaningful education, a functioning rule of law, a clean environment, accessible health care, a secure investment climate and broadband internet. Importantly, closing the income gap remains a strong indicator of successful governance as well.

The Global Day of Action on Military Spending provides us with an opportunity to look at the alternatives for the high levels of military expenditures that we see in all parts of the world.

The United Nations World Happiness Report 2013 mentions a “rising worldwide demand that policy be more closely aligned with what really matters to people as they themselves characterize their lives.”<sup>3</sup> Curtailing military spending to appropriate levels is one of the best contributions countries can make to allow all people in the world a valued and thriving existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Preliminary figure from 2013 SIPRI data

<sup>2</sup> OECD Newsroom, US\$133.5 billion by OECD/DAC in 2013

<sup>3</sup> [http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/09/WorldHappinessReport2013\\_online.pdf](http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/09/WorldHappinessReport2013_online.pdf), p.140