

## The World is Over-armed, and Peace is Under Funded

By Elijah Ortega

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon states "The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded."

The cold war has been over for more than two decades, yet the world inexplicably continues to increase military spending inadvertently instigating the unending conflict we aim to abolish. By over-arming ourselves in the West and in Asia, we continue the tradition of bloodshed that plagued the 20th century in which 250 wars were fought and 160 million lives were lost. By pouring arms into regions of the world already riddled with violence and instability, the U.S. for example has undermined its credibility as a proponent of peace and a defender of the victimized, becoming a resented presence to those we profess to help.

Each year, armed conflict kills an estimated 200,000 people. Millions more suffer indirectly from the threat of violence, which destroys livelihoods and displaces communities. How can we champion ourselves as being the banner of civilized society when the very thing we excel at is reinforcing an already robust international arms industry which leads to violence and the destruction of social, economic, political and cultural constructs? Our obsession with military spending has created a system academically referred to as the military-industrial complex, which acts against the preservation of people everywhere, including, ironically, U.S. citizens themselves.

The world must move away from war economy to a more sustainable peace economy based on soft power in order to tackle the more pressing threats facing humanity: extreme poverty, disease and inevitable climate change. We have a responsibility to explore nonviolent ways for restoring human ethics and celebrating our more impressive qualities such as compassion and sympathy than, say, the ability to vanquish one another.

Former US President Dwight Eisenhower once said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in a final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed"

Imagine if 25 million soldiers worldwide were replaced with 25 million peace-workers. Picture a world where for every gun manufactured, a hundred full-vaccination kits are created.

As the UNESCO Declaration on a Culture of Peace states, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." It is not in power strokes such as international treaties and world

conferences that we can achieve peace but rather in our daily activities which will ultimately be responsible for a paradigm shift in the status quo.

I believe by being better citizens we can exact the change for a better world with each passing generation as outdated ideals are left behind. Our hope for demilitarization truly does lie with citizens who can mobilize through grassroots movements and alter public opinion through means such as social media platforms and peaceful community outreach.

I, for one, look forward to that new dawn for mankind, a day where people, like the wonderful folks gathered here tonight, seek peace together as one species.