



Addressing Militarism for Climate Action

Key Messages

- The UNFCCC has failed to address the relationship between militarism and the climate crisis.
- Allowing states to hide their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) of their militaries has resulted in a lack of accountability for their impact on the climate crisis.
- States are spending an ever increasing amount on their military budgets while failing to deliver on climate finance commitments.
- Multiple large-scale wars and increasing weapons production, stockpiling, and military activity is increasing global emissions, perpetuating environmental racism, and hindering efforts to mitigate the climate crisis.

Recommendations

- The UNFCCC must address the impact that militarism is having on the climate crisis.
- Annex II states¹ must be willing to divest from increasing military budgets and invest in climate change mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage and financing a just transition.
- Governments must commit to thorough and transparent reporting of military emissions to the UNFCCC and use the upcoming updates to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to commit to verifiable reduction targets.

Background

COP28 marked a significant milestone; the adoption of the Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace² and the first time that peace has featured as a thematic day. The Declaration acknowledges the need for 'bolder collective action to build climate resilience' while focusing on fragile and conflict affected countries and communities. It stresses that financial resources, capacity, partnerships, data and information access must be scaled up and recognises that support must be conflict-sensitive. However, two major outputs of COP28, the Declaration and the Global Stocktake, both failed to recognise the bidirectional relationship between militarism and the climate crisis.

With multiple, devastating, large-scale wars waging across the globe and military spending rising year on year for almost a decade,³ the UNFCCC must highlight and address the connections between militarism and the climate crisis. The climate crisis is increasingly presented by states as a 'threat multiplier' which leads states to respond to the climate crisis with the military as a 'solution'. However, it is essential to understand the fundamental root causes of the climate crisis, considering factors including but not limited to imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy. Furthermore, militarism is dangerous for women, girls, and non-binary people, as research highlights the heightened risk of gender-based violence during conflicts⁴.

Militarism is fueling the climate emergency through two key aspects: the misdirection of public funds on the military instead of climate finance and the GHG emissions from the military. Azerbaijan, the hosts of COP29, have declared that COP29 will be a "Peace COP"⁵. A truly peace-focused COP must address increasing military spending that is taking public money from climate finance and driving global emissions higher.

Militarism and Climate Finance

The New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) is set to be adopted at COP29, ‘from a floor of \$100 billion per year’⁶ which has not yet been met. In the development of the NCQG, Annex II countries are pushing for the inclusion of private finance, diluting the responsibility to provide sufficient public funds. However, according to the latest figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) global military spending increased to \$2.44 trillion in 2023, marking the highest level recorded. This 6.8% increase in military spending from the previous year is the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009⁷ and suggests that public money is available to invest in climate action, but is instead being used to fuel increased militarism.

Annex II countries are spending 30 times as much on their military budgets compared to climate finance as shown in table 1⁸. These states must be responsible, transparent and reparative - if there is money for increasing stockpiles of weapons, there is money for climate mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total*
Military spending	1,038.9	1,006.7	948.7	961.8	981.1	1,040.0	1,094.1	1,159.3	7,281.9
Reported climate finance	52.4	61.8	n/a	58.5	71.6	79.9	80.4	83.3	487.9
Ratio	19.8:1	16.3:1	n/a	16.4:1	13.7:1	13.0:1	13.6:1	13.9:1	14.9:1
Estimated real climate finance**	26.2	30.9	n/a	29.3	35.8	39.9	40.2	41.6	243.9
Ratio	39.7:1	32.6:1	n/a	32.8:1	27.4:1	26.1:1	27.2:1	27.9:1	29.9:1

* 2015 not included – sources: OECD, SIPRI, Oxfam International

** Based on average of 50%

Table 1: Reported climate finance versus military spending by Annex II countries (2013 - 2020) in \$ billion⁹

Militarism and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

According to estimates by Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory, militaries are responsible for 5.5% of global emissions¹⁰, greater than other sectors such as civilian aviation (2%)¹¹ and civilian shipping (3%)¹². This means that if global militaries were a country, they would be the fourth largest emitter. The UNFCCC obliges some states to report their GHG emissions every year, but because reporting military emissions is voluntary, data is often absent or incomplete.

Furthermore, the estimation that militaries are responsible for 5.5% of global emissions only considers ‘everyday’ military activity and not the additional emissions created by warfighting. Estimates suggest that the first 18 months of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have contributed to global emissions more than the annual output of a highly industrialised country like Belgium¹³. Researchers have also estimated that the emissions from the first two months of Israel’s bombardment of Gaza are roughly the equivalent of 75 coal-fired power plants operating for a year¹⁴.

Since there is no internationally agreed framework for reporting conflict emissions, we cannot be sure how dramatically these wars are hindering efforts to reduce global emissions, and no country can be held accountable for the climate impacts of warfighting. Militaries are contributing significantly to the worsening climate crisis. Governments will not be able to meet their own national emissions reduction targets without reducing the emissions from their militaries. States must commit to thorough and transparent reporting of military emissions to the UNFCCC, and use the upcoming updates to NDCs to commit to verifiable emissions reduction targets.

Therefore feminists demand demilitarization for climate justice and the reallocation of military spending to provide resources for climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

This Issue Brief was developed by the Peace and Demilitarization Working Group, a cross-constituency Group hosted within the Women and Gender Constituency.

End Notes

- 1 UNFCCC: Annex II Countries (2000) <https://unfccc.int/cop3/fccc/climate/annex2.htm>
The countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.
- 2 COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace (2023) <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-declaration-on-climate-relief-recovery-and-peace>
- 3 SIPRI: Trends in World Military Expenditure (2023) <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2023>
- 4 Siân Herbert: Links between gender-based violence and outbreaks of violent conflict (2014) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089a5ed915d622c000325/hdq1169.pdf>
- 5 The Guardian: Cop29 summit to call for peace between warring states, says host Azerbaijan (2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/may/05/cop29-summit-to-call-for-peace-between-warring-states-says-host-azerbaijan>
- 6 UNFCCC: Report of COP21 (2016) <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf#page=8>
- 7 SIPRI: Trends in World Military Expenditure (2023) <https://doi.org/10.55163/BQGA2180>
- 8 TNI: Climate Collateral (2022) <https://www.tni.org/files/2022-11/Climate%20Collateral%20Report%20-%20TNI%20-%20final%20web.pdf>
- 9 TNI: Climate Collateral (2022) <https://www.tni.org/files/2022-11/Climate%20Collateral%20Report%20-%20TNI%20-%20final%20web.pdf>
- 10 Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory: Estimating the Military's Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions (2022) https://ceobs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SGR-CEOBS_Estimating_Global_Military_GHG_Emissions.pdf
- 11 Hannah Ritchie: What share of global CO₂ emissions come from aviation? (2024) <https://ourworldindata.org/global-aviation-emissions>
- 12 UK Parliament POSTnote: International shipping and emissions (2022) <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0665/>
- 13 Initiative on GHG accounting of war: Climate Damage Caused by Russia's War in Ukraine (2023) https://en.ecoaction.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/20231201_ClimateDamageWarUkraine18monthsEN_1.pdf
- 14 Neimark, Benjamin and Bigger, Patrick and Otu-Larbi, Frederick and Larbi, Reuben, A Multitemporal Snapshot of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the Israel-Gaza Conflict (2024) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4684768>