

May the Sound of Arms Be Silenced

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In his message for this year's World Day of Peace, Pope Francis draws the world's attention to the incredible amount of money and resources being spent on weapons of war. He hopes for a future in which peace shall flourish and hearts may be fixed on the goals of true peace and of building a better world. He makes a strong plea that a 'fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments' might be used instead for 'a global fund' to eradicate hunger and facilitate 'education for sustainable development and combating climate change'. Such a commitment, he says, would help 'disarm hearts' that are so easily filled with anxiety, the fear of war or even a desire for vengeance.

How much humanity needs God's mercy and forgiveness for inflicting the horrors and brutality of war across the world today: in Gaza and other parts of the Holy Land and Middle East, in Sudan, DRC, Yemen, Myanmar and Ukraine – sadly the list is long and shameful. We need to cry out for forgiveness for spending (in 2023) an estimated US\$2.5 trillion on armaments and military resources – an amount that has since been increasing, not decreasing. Such expenditure

cannot be reconciled with our Christian commitment to reconciliation and peace or with the beliefs of any of the world's major faiths and religions, or with secular principles of the common good and the flourishing of humanity.

The use in war of more and more sophisticated and powerful weapons – especially in the midst of streets, homes, hospitals and schools – makes it difficult to distinguish so-called 'modern warfare' from terror. How can tactics that cause thousands of civilian deaths, alongside the whole-sale destruction of food, water, health services and other infrastructure that is essential for survival, ever hope to restore justice and rights, resolve differences, respect human dignity and provide a path for reconciliation and peace?

I pray with Pope Francis: 'May the sound of arms be silenced ... May there be a ceasefire, may the hostages be released and aid be given to the people worn out by hunger and by war ... Peace does not only come with the end of wars but with the dawn of a new world, a world in which we realise that we are different, closer and more fraternal than we ever thought possible.'