



Peace Movement Aotearoa

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Submission: Defence Policy Review

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the 2023 Defence Policy Review and for agreeing to our requests that the deadline for all written submissions be extended. Our comments below are grouped in 5 sections:

- A. Introduction
- B. Concerns about this Review
- C. What a genuine Review would look like
- D. Specific issues raised in the Review
- E. Recommendation

A. Introduction

Peace Movement Aotearoa is the national networking peace organisation, established in 1981 and registered as an Incorporated Society in 1982. Our purpose is networking and providing information and resources on peace, humanitarian disarmament, justice and human rights issues. We have extensive national networks which include more than one hundred and fifty representatives of national or local peace, disarmament, human rights, justice, faith-based and community organisations.

Promoting disarmament and the realisation of human rights - in relation to social, economic, environmental and climate justice - are essential aspects of our work because of the crucial role these have in sustaining peaceful and just societies. We regularly provide information to United Nations human rights treaty monitoring bodies and to Special Procedures and mechanisms of the Human Rights Council¹ on a range of peace, human rights, disarmament and justice issues in Aotearoa New Zealand, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), the Women, Peace and Security agenda, military conduct, the impacts of military activities and military spending.

B. Concerns about this Review

We have serious concerns about the authenticity of this Review, which is based on outdated narrow notions of “military security”, rather than real human security that is focused on

human health and wellbeing, flourishing communities, climate action, protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, and care for the planet.

There is an underlying assumption that New Zealand will continue to have, and expand, combat-ready armed forces into the future: essentially, endless preparations for war. Yet none of the activities referred to in the Review online survey require combat-ready armed forces - except of course, combat.

The online survey, which apparently forms the bulk of public input into the Review, was framed in such a way as to ensure that a positive response to any of the questions would be used to justify increased levels of annual military spending and militarisation: for example, the first section had a list of activities - described inaccurately as NZDF roles - including humanitarian assistance, fisheries protection, transporting conservation supplies, disaster relief, hosting government events, search and rescue etc; and asked participants to rate "how important you think each is to New Zealand". It did not ask if it is appropriate or necessary to have combat-ready armed forces doing these activities, and there was no opportunity for submitters to make that distinction.

What a genuine Review would look like

It is our view that this public consultation should have started by asking whether New Zealand needs armed forces; with a fully informed public discussion on the extent to which military activities and costs may be detrimental to real security that meets the needs of all, resilience and sustainability.

Such a discussion would focus on the importance of ensuring the wellbeing of all New Zealanders and making a peaceful and positive contribution to regional peace and human security, instead of New Zealand continuing to be actively involved in the global cycle of violence; and it would examine seven key issues:

- **the economic and social costs of maintaining combat ready armed forces** - including whether annual expenditure of \$6+ billion² for the foreseeable future, and the \$20 billion dollars allocated over the next decade for increased combat capability - including warships and military planes - and cyber warfare capacity, is the most productive use of public money that could otherwise be used to enhance human security, resilience, and sustainability for all New Zealanders;
- **the environmental and biodiversity costs of military operations here and overseas** - including the impact of military training, exercises and combat operations on the environment and biodiversity;
- **the impact of military activities on climate change** - including military consumption of non-renewable resources, military emissions, and the diversion of human and financial resources to military activities (see also section D.ii below);
- **the human rights implications of military training and overseas deployments** - including the NZDF's compliance with OPAC and other human rights instruments, and humanitarian law; the impact on New Zealand's reputation when military training and

exercises (here and overseas) or combat operations are conducted with the armed forces of states that are engaged in gross human rights violations, such as Indonesia in West Papua, or when New Zealand armed forces deployed overseas may be involved or implicated in such violations, and / or violations of humanitarian law;

- **issues around disarmament legislation and policy** - including whether military activities and cooperation with the armed forces of nuclear weapons states are a breach of the aiding and abetting provisions of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987, Section 5; whether it is desirable for New Zealand armed forces to be engaged in military training or deployments with armed forces that may use weapons prohibited by New Zealand law (including nuclear weapons, cluster munitions and landmines), or that are not a state party to the international disarmament treaties that New Zealand has joined, or that may be engaged in activities contrary to the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas which New Zealand has endorsed; and if military training or deployment with those states may be detrimental to the overall international disarmament and arms control regime;
- **foreign policy implications** - including whether we could be making a more peaceful and positive contribution to global peace and security. We note in this regard that successive governments have placed much emphasis on their “independent” stance and making “a positive impact on international peace and security”, but can a foreign policy based on military alliances and allegiances, and apparently endless preparation for war as part of the global cycle of violence, really be considered to be either independent or positive? Surely a genuinely independent and positive foreign policy would focus on diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and so on that are aimed at preventing armed conflict, rather than militarised responses; as well as humanitarian assistance and diplomatic support for peace and reconciliation processes during, and after, situations of armed conflict, as well as an increased focus on promoting disarmament; and
- **alternatives to armed forces** - with the exception of combat, all of the “roles” that were listed in the online survey can be done by dedicated civilian agencies specifically trained and equipped for these purposes: fisheries and resource protection, maritime border control, and maritime search and rescue by a civilian coastguard with inshore and offshore capabilities, equipped with a range of vehicles, vessels and aircraft that are suitable for our coastline, Antarctica and the Pacific, which - along with equipping civilian agencies for land-based search and rescue, and for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance here and overseas - would be a much cheaper option as none of these require expensive combat hardware.

D. Specific issues raised in the Review

According to the Review information, it *“is important to make sure future investments are fit-for-purpose in a dynamic security environment, with a Pacific region grappling with climate change and the intensification of strategic competition”* - but the “investments” we really need to ensure a liveable future are those focused on achieving social justice and

climate justice, not militarisation. Our comments on two of the issues raised in this quote are included below.

i) Intensification of strategic competition: As with any competition, New Zealand has a choice as to whether it gets involved or not - it is not compulsory. There are many far more positive contributions we could be making to regional and global peace and security instead of choosing to be drawn in to “great power” rivalry.

The current rhetoric from media commentators, military personnel and politicians about the strategic threat from China’s increasing military spending and militarisation of the region is over-hyped and lacks balance: for example, there is seldom any reference to the US level of military spending, or that the latest global military spending figures clearly show that the US spends more than the ten next highest military spending states (including China) combined, or that the US has far more military bases in the Pacific (and elsewhere) than any other state.

In the face of intensifying strategic competition, New Zealand’s focus must be on increased diplomacy rather than increased militarisation. We note that in last year’s Budget, the amount allocated for MFAT - which includes all of New Zealand’s diplomatic activity, disarmament work, overseas development assistance, humanitarian aid, and more - was equivalent to less than 30% of the amount allocated to military spending. Imagine the difference it would make to New Zealand’s relationships with governments and communities in other parts of the world if those figures were reversed.

Now more than ever, with the future of life on earth at stake, states must work together to find sustainable solutions, instead of continuing to pour public money into destructive military activity - the ultimate in unsustainability.

It is more essential than ever before that New Zealand’s domestic, regional and international focus must be on cooperation for action on climate change; on working to ensure a decent standard of living for all, and that health and social welfare systems can function well in national, regional or global emergencies; and on promoting climate justice, flourishing communities and care for the planet - not on strategic competition.

ii) Pacific region grappling with climate change: We agree this is the major security threat to the region and to Aotearoa, with increasingly frequent severe weather events and rising sea levels.

However, what is not mentioned in the Review information is that military activities are a major contributor to climate change, with the global military carbon footprint estimated to be at least 5.5% - exceeded only by the carbon footprint of China, the US, and India. In addition, military spending and the focus on maintaining combat-ready armed forces are draining the financial and human resources urgently needed for action on climate change.

There is an increasingly desperate need for climate funding for the Pacific and for communities affected by sea level rises and extreme weather events here in Aotearoa, as well as for practical assistance in the form of equipment and personnel: as mentioned above, this - along with other activities such as humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, and so

on - are better done by specifically trained and equipped civilian personnel, which would also cost far less than using unsuitable military equipment and combat-trained personnel. Surely action on the climate emergency which threatens the future of life on earth must be the priority instead of endless preparations for war?

Some of the other issues facing the Pacific were referred to in the Review online survey, and again these needs can be better met and addressed more cheaply by civilian agencies, such as a civilian coastguard with vessels and aircraft for inshore and offshore fisheries and resource protection, maritime search and rescue, and border control when required.

E. Recommendation

Our main recommendation is that no decisions should be made about the armed forces until there has been a fully informed public discussion, as outlined in the 'What a genuine Review would look like' section above. In the interim, serious consideration must be given to replacing the NZDF with dedicated civilian agencies, such as a civilian coastguard for inshore and offshore fisheries and resource protection, maritime search and rescue, and border control; and civilian agencies specifically trained and equipped for humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and land-based search and rescue.

A transition from combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies, along with increased funding for diplomacy, would ensure New Zealand could make a far more positive contribution to wellbeing and real security for all New Zealanders, and at the regional and global levels, than it can by continuing to maintain and re-arm small but costly armed forces.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission.

Edwina Hughes,
Coordinator, Peace Movement Aotearoa.

References

¹ For example, to the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People in 2005; to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2007, 2013 and 2017; to the Human Rights Committee in 2009, 2010, 2014 and 2016; to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2010, 2011, 2016, 2020, 2022 and 2023; to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2011, 2012, 2016 and 2018; to the Committee Against Torture in 2015; to the Human Rights Committee for the General Discussion on Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2015 and 2017; to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Draft General Comment on Article 4 of the Convention (Public Spending) in 2015 and on the Draft General Comment No. 26 on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change in 2023; to the Biennial Reports of the UN Secretary-General on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education; and jointly with the Aotearoa Indigenous Rights Trust and others, to the Human Rights Council for the Universal Periodic Review of New Zealand in 2008, 2009 and 2014.

² The total across the three Budget Votes where most military expenditure is itemised: Vote Defence Force \$4,898,349,000; Vote Defence \$1,177,959,000; and Vote Education \$1,177,959,000. Vote Defence is included because the Ministry exists solely to provide support to the NZDF, military advice to government etc.