

Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace is an ecumenical Peace Church network made up of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace-service agencies in Europe.

Statement concerning increasing arms trade and military intervention

The European network Church and Peace views with alarm data published on 22 February by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that show a 14 per cent increase in the volume of international transfers of major weapons between 2006-10 and 2011-15.

Arms exports play a significant role in intensifying and perpetuating violent conflicts in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the world. In light of an all-time global high number of people seeking refuge from armed conflict, it is crucial to end the arms trade.

We welcome the European Parliament's call to the European Union on Thursday the 25 February to impose an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, given that country's suspected targeting of civilians in Yemen. We view this action as an important further step to support reducing the international arms trade to ensure that external activities of European Union member states "promote democracy and the rule of law, prevent conflicts, eradicate poverty, foster intercultural dialogue, and maintain international stability and security" *.

We have observed that many governments are not even respecting national, European Union and international commitments they have made regarding the export of weapons, such as the eight criteria of EU Common Position 944/2008/CFSP and the criteria of the global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We urge our members, together with the churches of Europe, to call on their respective governments to work to end the arms trade and at the very least to ratify and implement existing treaties and resolutions as a step towards restricting arms production and trade.

Further, together with our members in France, we are deeply concerned about the ramifications of the European Parliament resolution on the Mutual Defence Clause (Article 42(7) TEU), adopted on 21 January 2016 in response to the state of war declared by the President of France following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015.

We reject a military approach in response to terrorism. We urge instead the use of accepted European Union instruments such as the non-military stipulations of the EU Action Plan on combating terrorism and the EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment and related guidelines, which are specifically designed to prevent and deal with the consequences of terrorist attacks in Europe.

In addition, we call on our members and all ecumenical partners in Europe to advocate for governments to comply fully with the UN Charter and international humanitarian and human rights law.

In light of increasing arms trade and legitimization of the use of military intervention in response to terrorism, now is the time for the churches to respond to the Gospel call to nonviolence and to recommit to working for structures of peace based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts.

In this regard our network's Annual General Meeting in Paris on 10-12 June will focus on alternatives to violence in the face of terror, theological underpinnings for this witness and ways for the churches to engage. The AGM will conclude with demonstrations at the Eurosatory arms fair.

The members of Church and Peace remain participation committed to taking concrete steps to build a peaceable, just and sustainable Europe.

Church and Peace Administrative Committee 1 March 2016

^{*} Paragraph E, European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2015 on arms export: implementation of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP