

10 June 2020

Faith Statement on NDAA Priorities

As communities of faith, we stand horrified by the violent response of the state to demands for justice by the Black community. We condemn the pervasive militarism of the US in its response to both domestic and global challenges. Whether it is police tear gassing protestors standing up for Black lives, or military drone operators that target Black & Brown communities abroad, the United States' approach to conflict resolution is rooted in racism, and disproportionately impacts communities of color. In many ways, people of faith have been both complicit in and complacent with these racist, militaristic structures.

In some religious texts, people are warned about militaristic kings. God warns that such rulers would oppress the people and take their sons to command armies and make weapons of war.

This warning rings true today, as we see the state use its power to call up armies, spend our national wealth on weapons, and go to war in our communities and abroad. Our leaders have squandered our taxpayer dollars on bottomless stockpiles of weapons instead of healthcare. They have allowed broad Authorizations for Use of Military Force to permit ceaseless war on Black and Brown people in countries around the world, bringing insecurity and death cloaked in the guise of national security. And they have chosen to militarize the southern border to further a racist immigration agenda.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has been used to authorize this militarism. It is imperative that this year's bill include provisions that radically alter how the United States approaches conflict resolution, and makes every effort to de-militarize our responses.

In this year's NDAA, our faith communities want Congress to prioritize:

- **Decreasing the Pentagon budget, and investing in our communities.** Our taxpayer dollars should be spent on the wellbeing of our communities, through public health, education, and peacebuilding. It is unconscionable that the United States continues to spend so much of its discretionary budget on the military each year, while hospitals, schools, and communities remain underfunded. Given the pressing crises we face that make starkly clear that we need very different tools to ensure real security, this year's NDAA should authorize a significantly lower level of spending for the Pentagon.
- **Ending, not just limiting, the 1033 Program,** which makes surplus military equipment available to domestic police departments. As the nation has come together to protest the unjust treatment of Black people by the police, they have been met with unnecessary violent force from the very institutions that are

supposed to protect them. Eliminating this military surplus program is one step towards de-militarizing our police.

- **Repealing the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force.** These AUMFs have enabled the United States to engage in endless war. They have been used by multiple Administrations to justify military actions in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Pakistan, despite shaky connections to the original intent of the AUMFs. We must repeal both of these AUMFs immediately.
- **Prohibiting the use of DoD funds to build the border wall.** The creation of a wall at the southern border further militarizes our border communities, and the desire for a wall stems from racist and xenophobic priorities of this Administration. The NDAA should expressly prohibit the use of DoD funds to build the wall.

Time and time again, violent militarized responses have proven that weapons and war do not make us safer. The faith community calls on our leaders to begin the process of beating their “swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” It is time for Congress to stop authorizing bloated military budgets, endless war, and violence at home and abroad.

Signed:

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee

Center on Conscience & War

Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

National Council of Churches

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries