



Network of
Christian
Peacemaking
Organisations

nepo election briefing

Emerging threats to human security are likely to make the future challenging for everyone, particularly for the marginalised and poor of the world. They will be the ones to feel the sharp edge of global warming and rising prices as competition for scarce resources increases. Decisions taken by the politicians we elect could well affect their lives more than they affect ours.

We could put our faith in our country's military and economic power, and take the resources we need to preserve our affluent lifestyle at the expense of the poor. Or, consistent with our Christian belief that all people are our neighbours made in the image of God, cast our vote on the basis that real security comes from justice and sharing resources.

This would mean cuts in military spending and the pursuit of an ethical foreign policy designed to increase support for sustainable development to poorer countries, through our aid programme, and investments in cooperation to solve the problems of climate change and the need to secure renewable energy sources. At home, it would encourage the nation to embrace a simpler way of life, reducing its carbon footprint and protecting the natural environment for the benefit of future generations throughout the world.



Middle East

Afghanistan

The British government still has a major military presence in Afghanistan, with 9,500 troops deployed around the Helmand area of the country. The February 2010 Green Paper on Strategic Defence states that our operations in Afghanistan are likely to dominate military activity for several years to come. Our forces are there to “protect the UK’s national security by denying a safe haven to violent extremists.” Since 2001, 256 military personnel have been killed and countless Afghani civilians.

Israel–Palestine

Little headway has been made in the peace process. The war on Gaza in 2008/9, combined with the ongoing blockade of Gaza (this began in 2007), is causing enormous hardship to the population. The issue of accountability for actions during the war is unresolved. The British government abstained from voting in support of the UN-initiated Goldstone Report looking into crimes during the Gaza war saying, “the report is flawed but the issues grave.”

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories the building of illegal settlements continues – a halt to settlement building was to have been a key feature of a new peace plan. Britain continues to sell arms to Israel stating, “We do not believe that the current situation in the Middle East would be improved by imposing an arms embargo on Israel.”

Questions

- How does our involvement in the ongoing war in Afghanistan “protect the UK’s national interest?”
- What plan does your party have for the withdrawal of armed forces from Afghanistan and how best can we support the process of development and democracy in Afghanistan?
- What would your party do to encourage Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza?
- What plans does your party have for re-energising the peace process for Israel–Palestine? Settlements and the separation wall have both been challenged in international law. How would your party engage with Israel on these issues?
- Would your party be prepared to enter talks with all parties in the ongoing conflict – including Hamas – as a sign of genuine openness to a process of conflict resolution?
- As a step in the demilitarisation of the region, would your party be prepared to support an arms embargo of Israel?
- Can you assure us that your party would not engage in any pre-emptive military actions against Iran?

Arms Trade



Undoubtedly, the arms trade fuels conflict and leads to an increase in casualties, causing human rights violations, pollution, corruption, debt, torture and many other problems on the way. Academic studies of arms transfers show that the arms trade is a significant element in the likelihood of a country sliding into war.

The UK is currently one of the top five largest arms exporters in the world, exporting billions of pounds worth of arms and military equipment per year. The government exercises minimal discretion, granting export licences to countries involved in armed conflict and to countries classified as being of concern in the government's own human rights report.

There are also major corruption issues around the arms trade. In December 2006, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) dropped its corruption investigation into BAE Systems' Saudi arms deals following pressure from BAE and the Saudi regime. However, the SFO and agencies in other countries continued to investigate many other BAE deals. On 5th February 2010 the SFO announced it had reached a settlement with BAE in relation to its long-running investigations into corruption in BAE's deals in several countries. Although BAE admitted guilt in Tanzania, there will be no opportunity to discover the truth behind BAE's activities in South Africa, Romania and the Czech Republic.

Questions

- The government has continued to promote arms exports vigorously through UKTI Defense & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO). There is no economic justification for such support: arms sales account for just 1.5% of UK exports and sustain just 0.2% of the national labour force. Will your party stop this practice?
- What steps will your party take to reduce the arms trade and its impact in general?
- The arms trade is massively subsidised, to the tune of at least £9,000 per job per year. What will your party do to stop this distortion of the marketplace?
- Would your party be prepared to use this subsidy to invest in research and projects that support companies in the move from military to civilian production?
- How would your party ensure that BAE Systems is prosecuted to the full extent of the law with regards to any allegations of corruption?

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

In 1968 the major powers signed up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that seeks to limit the development and expansion of nuclear weapons and nuclear states. Enshrined within the treaty is an obligation to actively reduce the stockpile of nuclear weapons and to work towards total nuclear disarmament. Our government will be participating in the 2010 NPT Review Conference in New York in May.

The last nine parliaments (four Conservative and five Labour) have achieved little progress in reducing nuclear weapons at home or overseas. Instead the political parties are intent on replacing Trident at a cost estimated by Greenpeace to be £97 billion over its lifetime. Also not factored in is the future cost of disposal and storage of the present systems nuclear system.

The use of the weapons is against international law, because they are indiscriminate in their use. They are immoral as they attempt to control through fear and coercion and consume huge resources.

Nuclear weapon systems are unusable. They do not work against terrorism or insurgents. They divert much-needed resources, research and development from health, welfare and education. At a time of great public debt it seems likely that the government will cut funding of public services in favour of an independent British weapons system. It takes little courage to say no to weapons of mass destruction, only common sense and honesty.

Questions

- What is your party's policy on the replacement of Trident? Does your party see a role for nuclear weapons within its overall defence strategy?
- How does your party square this with the UK's obligation within the NPT to work towards total nuclear disarmament?
- Would your party be willing to sign up to a Nuclear Weapons Convention as a multilateral strategy towards disarmament?
- How open and honest about the cost of these systems will your party be?



Military Spending and Human Security

Despite global economic turmoil and the promised strategic defence review, the UK continues to spend huge sums on military security. According to the National Audit Office (NAO) the top fifteen UK military projects now under construction in the UK will cost the taxpayer £55.7 billion. This enormous figure does not include the cost of the proposed replacement for the UK's nuclear deterrent, Trident, estimated by Greenpeace to cost around £97 billion over its lifetime. In addition, the cost of ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to increase, totalling £4 billion in 2008/9. Overall the UK has the fourth highest military budget in the world and has the highest per capita military spending in Europe.

Whilst building security and justice in our world is vital, there are other means than the military model. Human security puts the defence of individuals rather than the nation state at its core and seeks to address threats to security not by attacking the symptoms but by attempting to tackle the root causes in a proactive way.

Building security for the common good will require work on many essential components, starting with the redirection of military spending and research into life-giving projects that address the real security needs of our time. Other components will include strengthening the authority of the United Nations through its democratic reform and renewal; developing international law and the structures to

police and prevent conflicts from escalating; achieving political and economic rights for all human beings and communities; and educating citizens for a new understanding that our future security depends on global welfare and the common good rather than self-interest and national prosperity.

Questions

- Does your party accept the need to reduce the amount that we as a nation are spending on the military and increase funds for real conflict prevention programmes?
- In what ways will your party seek to increase global security, for example by strengthening the United Nations?
- Do you accept that the best way to achieve global peace and security is to address the underlying causes of global conflict such as socio-economic division and climate change?
- What is your party doing to determine the real human security needs of communities here and in the global south?
- How would your party begin the process of redirecting our national budget from warfare to welfare, spending instead on health and education here, and on conflict prevention and sustainable development projects at international level?

What next

Use these materials to inform yourself and your church community on key peace and security issues for the general election. You could make a display of this information or include it in newsletters or bulletins during the election campaign.

Use the questions when writing to/holding meetings with your prospective candidates.

Host a meeting/hustings with your own church community or, better still, with an ecumenical group. Candidates will want to be seen to be communicating with faith communities and faith communities have a distinct contribution to make to the election process.

Useful resources

Churches Together in Britain & Ireland have produced a very useful election briefing on a range of issues, including peace and security. They have also produced a guide to organising meetings at local level. Both documents can be found here: <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/427>

Find out more about the member organisations of NCPO and their work on peace and security via the website: www.ncpo.org.uk

Network of Christian Peace Organisations: Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Baptist Peace Fellowship, Campaign Against Arms Trade Christian Network, Christian International Peace Service, Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Christian Ecology Link, Christian Peacemaker Teams (UK), Church and Peace, Clergy Against Nuclear Arms, Community for Reconciliation, Congregational Peace Fellowship, Ekklesia, Fellowship of Reconciliation, London Mennonite Centre, Methodist Peace Fellowship, Northern Friends Peace Board, Pax Christi, Peace School, Quaker Peace & Social Witness, SPEAK, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation & Peace, Student Christian Movement, United Reformed Church Peace Fellowship

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