

## **Protection of Human Rights**

### **Weapons**

Annually, billions of dollars in the federal budget are allocated for weapons research & development, testing, production, foreign sales, security measures and war. The Department of Defense, which is in charge of the military, oversees spending to fulfill its mission to deter war and protect the security of the U.S. The Department of Energy budget includes spending related to nuclear weapons. Homeland Security's budget covers U.S. borders and, along with the State Department, other domestic and foreign intelligence and security requirements. Because the federal budget is known to contain the "black budget," or highly secret details, the grand total and the precise nature of weapons under development are educated guesses.

Weapons research and development competes for highly intelligent, skilled scientists and technocrats from all major disciplines and many countries. Production requires materials such as tantalum, tungsten and tin sourced from the Democratic Republic of Congo, throughout which militias, funded by sale of these minerals, kidnap, rape and murder with impunity. In countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, mining is unregulated, which intensifies destruction of the environment, local societies and livelihoods and contaminates and/or depletes fresh water resources. U.S. outsourcing and foreign government requirements to "offset" the weapons sales with U.S. commercial purchases or investments lead to increased wages and the building of a middle class. However, India, Brazil and other countries are recording increased HIV/AIDS and other health impacts as young, better-paid workers seek a more comfortable, Western lifestyle. Foreign military weapons sales and national security procedures have led to sustained civil and international wars, massive migrations and refugee camps and often, increased repression. Additionally, thousands of U.S. and other country nationals have become or work for private military contractors, e.g. Blackwater (now XeServices). English-speaking Africa, Burma, Israel/Palestine, Peru and the Philippines are only a few examples of areas in which Sisters of Mercy minister or witness to struggles for an end to civil strife and a just peace.

The Department of Defense (DOD) Top 100 contractors and a significant number of the Top 200 Federal Contractors engage in some aspect of offense and/or defense contracting. While private contractors have always assisted the military, e.g. making uniforms, providing transportation, offering medical assistance, the military today is dependent upon the private sector for everything from food service to private security to classroom teaching to prison management to translation to extraditions. DOD contractors, too, have evolved. When private security and communications/intelligence opportunities emerged, these companies successfully obtained contracts for projects such as the census, NYC transit security, training of nurses, water stewardship, monitoring refugee camps, assisting governments of less developed nations to train police and military and to draft their constitutions.

Investors consistently request transparency on ethical criteria, public policy decisions, and human rights impact as they relate to foreign military sales, development of weapons for space, and specific weapons/systems such as drones, cluster bombs. Holding stock in DOD contractors sufficient to raise these issues through shareholder resolutions and to speak for responsibility and accountability during the annual general meeting raises the human and environmental impacts of DOD contracts. The shareholder resolution and annual shareholder meeting is at times an occasion for local peace groups to organize vigils/demonstrations/press conferences and/or a presence/speaker at the meeting. Often, too, shareholder efforts will complement the work of the few networks and organizations that are addressing weapons production and sales issues. The Global Network against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, based in Maine, has an international board of directors and rotates its annual meetings so that participants learn issues directly. Oxfam is working on an investment project, "Better Returns in a Better World," to address poverty, incorporating bribery, corruption and other financial/weapons procurement issues worked on through the United Nations and other organizations.

Addressing the impact of companies on this issue is aligned with the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy to work more effectively toward nonviolence.

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