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RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE MILITARIZATION OF AFRICA

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

The Extent of Militarization in Africa

The African continent is currently engaged in a process of rapid militarization, demonstrated by the fact that military expenditures are higher now than ever before and increasing numbers of Africans are involved in some form of military service or activity. Several statistics illustrate this trend: In 1982, African military spending reached $18 billion. The rate of increase for military expenditures in the African continent between 1972-1982 was higher than any other region except the Middle East. By 1962, there were 1.3 million Africans in military service, representing a 38% increase since 1972.

Military governments tend to dominate the African political spectrum. In May 1984 the New York Times reported: "Twenty-four of the continent's 51 independent nations are now led by soldiers. In many countries, the late 1960's, when much of Africa was in transition to independence, virtually no country was under military rule. But in the past dozen years, 11 sub-Saharan countries have come under the influence of the military." This trend has continued into the 1990s.

The Role of Industrialized Nations

Transfers of arms to Africa from industrialized nations result in rapid militarization. In the period 1976-1983, the USSR provided 46% of arms agreements to sub-Saharan Africa. Western European nations accounted for 30% (including 10% for France). The United States (US) accounted for 18%. In 1981 and 1982, the USSR provided $2 billion worth of arms agreements to Africa. In 1981, the biggest part of the Soviet Union's $2 billion aid program to Africa was designated for military assistance. This assistance was built upon by additional military assistance from Eastern European countries and Cuba to Marxist-oriented African governments.

The Horn of Africa is where the strongest USSR military presence is felt. As a result of Soviet bloc assistance, since 1960 Ethiopia has developed one of Africa's strongest armies. Modern weaponry helped the Ethiopian government defeat Somalia in the Ogaden as well as to contain Eritrean fighting for secession in Ethiopian northern regions.

Closely related to the USSR's activity in the Horn of Africa is its marked interest in becoming an Indian Ocean power. An indication of Soviet interest in the region is the constant presence of Soviet ships in the ocean since 1979.

The Soviet Union also provides substantial arms transfers to Angola in southern Africa. These involve highly sophisticated tanks, armored cars, helicopters and fighter planes. Cuban troops are stationed on Angolan soil.

Since 1981, US military assistance to African countries has reached all time highs. For example, in 1983, nineteen African nations were receiving some category of military aid; today there are thirty-six. The top recipients are Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Kenya, Liberia, and Zaire. In addition, significant military relations are developing between the US, Botswana, Cameroon, and military weapons have been rushed to Chad. Since 1981, US military sales and aid to sub-Saharan Africa have increased nearly threefold, jumping from $136 million in 1982 to a proposed $400 million package in 1985. Proposals have been made for the US to train large numbers of sub-Saharan African military personnel in Africa, in 1984 alone more than $100 million worth of military equipment was exported to South Africa by the US.

In addition to increased weapons sales agreements, shipments, and military training, the US has signed cooperation agreements with Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan. These nations have agreed to provide facilities for the American Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) and to cooperate with RDF military exercises. The US has provided funds for the construction of airfields and ports in Kenya and Somalia.

Canada has provided arms transfers to the African continent and is considered to be an important supplier to certain African countries. Between 1976-1979, the cumulative value of Canadian arms transfers to Africa was $130 million. The bulk of recent Canadian arms transfers is military transport planes (such as the De Havilland DHC-5D).

The Republic of South Africa is actively involved in the militarization of Southern Africa. It has been estimated by South African government officials themselves that South Africa's defense expenditure will reach about $3 billion in 1985.
South Africa uses its military strength to silence dissident voices at home and to maintain South African economic dominance in all of southern Africa. This has made South Africa a dangerous neighbor to surrounding states. This danger is even more notable when South Africa's nuclear capability is acknowledged. In recent years, direct South African military intervention has occurred in the surrounding sovereign states of Lesotho, Angola, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Botswana.

South Africa also exercises its military power to strengthen and to continue its occupation of Namibia. On repeated instances, the United Nations General Assembly has demanded that South Africa withdraw from Namibia and that the government of Namibia be handed over to the international community and then to the Namibian people. South African occupation of Namibia has also been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice.

The South African military occupation of Namibia has caused widespread death, fear, and suffering among the one million plus inhabitants of that vast country. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches noted in mid-1984 that “Namibia today can only be described as a military camp. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 strong South African occupation force is desperately attempting to keep Namibia and its rich natural resources within the grasp of the apartheid system. Its methods of control have become even more ruthless and cruel. Torture and assassination of randomly selected victims...have become systematic.”

South Africa’s occupation of Namibia has been countered by the Southwest African People’s Organization (SWAPO), that came to view armed resistance to South Africa as a prerequisite to independence only after the failure of peaceful protests and non-violent resistance methods.

The Human Cost of Africa’s Militarization

Statistics and financial figures narrate only part of the story of African militarization. The ultimate way to measure Africa’s spiraling militarization is through human cost. Alarmed by widespread loss of innocent lives in military operations, the All Africa Conference of Churches states that: “One of the most disturbing features of the arms race in Africa is that much of the arms has not been used against external populations but against internal populations seeking better ways of life. Independent African states have persecuted political opponents and denied political participation to and suppressed minorities.”

The first result of the militarization of Africa is increased hunger and starvation.

In early 1984, the Food and Agriculture Organization noted that one-third of Africa’s population, or 150 million people, are “immediately threatened with starvation.” Announcing a world-wide church campaign to address the African food crisis, ecumenical representatives predicted, “Five million children face death, with another five million likely to suffer life-long damage to their health as a result of dietary deficiency.” The food crisis in Africa has dramatically affected nearly half of the continent’s countries.

The current African drought is a “natural” factor causing widespread hunger. But social factors are at work as well: overpopulation, international economic structures, inefficient and restrictive food policies in African countries themselves and militarization all work together to increase hunger.

How does the militarization of Africa affect hunger? Energy used for war and preparing for war cannot be used for developing food sources, pushing back the desert and feeding hungry people. Militarizing a country diverts funds, skilled personnel, and research away from producing and distributing food to purchasing arms and training personnel for their use.

Present policies in several of Africa’s hungriest countries illustrate the inter-relationship between hunger and militarization:

- War-torn Angola was expected to require massive cereal imports in 1984 according to Food and Agriculture Organization estimates. It was found, however, that getting food to those in areas under “rebel” control was nearly impossible due to the dangers of widespread conflict.

A World Council of Churches report noted that “more and more regions encounter food deficiencies, while transport for food supplies becomes ever more hazardous.” Simultaneously, Angola’s port authorities assigned top priority to processing incoming military imports. The result was suspension of food supply shipments to Angola by the World Council of Churches, despite urgent needs, because the shipments remained blocked in the ports.

- In Chad, the southern “breadbasket” of the country achieved high agricultural production levels in 1983-84. These crops could not be marketed in the north due to the on-going hostilities. With lowered prices on their hands as a result of the unmarketable surplus, farmers were discouraged from producing yet more food.

- Ethiopia’s military expenditure comprises about eleven percent of its gross national product. This expenditure, along with foreign military assistance, is directed at controlling liberation front activities in the north of the country. The warfare in two of the country’s northern regions, Tigray and Eritrea, has devastated agricultural activity to the point that few internal food reserves exist for countering the effects of the current drought. Several million persons are thought to need food aid, but only about half receive food assistance. The government says this is due to financial constraints in transporting relief assistance. A Mennonite Central Committee report on the situation states that “in a real sense it could be said that the government lacks the resources to respond to the food problem because it is busy using its resources to cause the food problem.”

A second result of the militarization of Africa is a sharp increase in the African refugee population. More than four million refugees - almost half the world’s total - are struggling for survival across the continent of Africa.
Ruth Sivard, an analyst on world military spending, has summarized the connection between refugees and militarization: "For the citizens, military control over the political processes means in many cases that governments are less responsive to the needs of the majority of the population than to the requirements of those who have economic power. It means less political freedom, less opportunity for gradual, evolutionary broadening of the development process to include all economic groups. In bottling up change, military-dominated governments also foster rebellion. They control it by the use of force against the populace. Repressive measures include arbitrary arrest, degrading treatment, brutality, torture and summary execution, all of which leads to people becoming refugees."

The intense militarization of Africa, combined with natural factors, economic fragility and political instability, has forced many African countries to become hosts for refugees from neighboring countries and conflicts. Simultaneously, the host countries themselves provide refugees to their neighbors. An example of the dynamic is Zaire. In mid-1984 the number of refugee camps in Zaire was 283,500. Most of these refugees (about 215,000) were from Angola. Yet, more than 20,000 Zairian refugees had been located in Angola itself. Zairian refugees were also found in Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Sudan.

The effect of the militarization of Africa is circular. It contributes to the hunger of millions and to the creation of huge mobile populations moving across national borders in flight from war, persecution, and deprivation. At the same time, it consolidates social factors in the world's materially poorest continent by diverting scarce financial resources from the upbuilding of human potential through education, health and national development programs. This circular effect is observed in Chad, one of the region's least underprivileged countries, where about 21 of every 100 babies die in infancy. Yet, Chad spends seven times more on military expenditures than on national health programs.

The World Council of Churches Sixth Assembly's description of rampant militarism is especially applicable to the African context: "Priorities have been dangerously distorted. Attention has been drawn away from the fundamental needs and rights of poor nation. The number of military regimes has grown, contributing further to a largely male-dominated process of global militarization. Justice is often sacrificed on the altar of narrowly perceived national security interests. Racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and ideological conflicts are exacerbated, corruption is rife, a spirit of fear and suspicion is fostered through the increasing portrayal of others as the enemy: all this further contributes to dishonor, human suffering and increased threats to peace."

Efforts within Africa itself to deal with armed conflict often have been successful. Since 1966 the Organization of African Unity, a continental grouping to which all African states belong, has labored ceaselessly through diplomacy, arbitration, and mediation commissions and peace-keeping forces to reduce armed conflict in Africa. Africa's major ecumenical organ, the All Africa Conference of Churches, played a decisive role in mediating a Sudan settlement in 1972, when that nation was gripped by civil war.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, August 2-7, 1985:

- Urges all nations to stop or reduce military aid to African nations and to promote the use of diplomatic means, development aid, and technical assistance in the resolution of African conflicts.
- Expresses its solidarity with the All Africa Conference of Churches and other African bodies in their efforts to decrease militarization in Africa and to minister to those persons who experience hunger and/or displacement because of militarization.
- Urges congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to study the causes and effects of militarization.
- Urges congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to aid the victims of African militarization by giving to the Week of Compassion and by sponsoring those African refugees who are approved for resettlement in the United States and Canada.
- Calls on the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to communicate the concerns of the resolution to the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada and to the heads of state of other major military suppliers, including the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany.
- Calls on congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to communicate the concerns of the resolution to the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada and to members of Congress.
- Refers this statement to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA for consideration by its Governing Board meeting at Fort Worth, Texas, November 6-8, 1985 and to the Canadian Council of Churches.