

A New Zealand Arms Industry?

Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand

Statement on the New Zealand Defence Industry Strategy

Since early October, New Zealand's Minister of Defence, Judith Collins, has been promoting the New Zealand Defence Industry Strategy (<https://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/new-zealand-defence-industry-strategy-delivering-capability-faster/>). This proposal aims to stimulate technical innovation and support defensive and offensive preparedness by developing a high tech arms industry, manufacturing weapons for New Zealand and the rest of the world.

Quakers—in New Zealand, the Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri—have for centuries stood against war and the circumstances that lead to and support wars. We believe that all life is to be valued and protected, and that the best way of making peace is to look for, and listen to, the good that is in all people. For this reason alone, we would speak against the manufacture and sales of weapons of war. One doesn't have to be a pacifist, though, to see many of the pitfalls of this plan. If we focus on developing weaponry and preparing for war, we risk distracting our attention from the threats that really matter, with the result that we threaten our security rather than enhance it.

The Defence Industry Strategy comes from a mindset which, apart from the specific technology targeted, lies essentially in the world of World War II. Then, we knew which nations threatened our security, how they threatened us, what other nations were threatened, and how we could help each other defend ourselves against the threat.

In the 80 years since then, the world has changed massively. Not only have our alliances shifted, but New Zealand has also changed. Since the 1970s, New Zealand has built a reputation by recognising the fallacies of popular defence dogma. Against the commitment of virtually all western nations, we rejected the notion that security can be gained by threatening to destroy civilisation with nuclear weapons. Many of us have also realised the fallacy of seeking peace through deterrence--the idea that building up our military will keep us safe. This simply leads to arms races that divert resources from addressing more pressing issues, spending an increasing proportion of tax dollars on the military. Our security comes from developing good relations with other nations, not threatening them. Thinking more broadly, the types of threats that we face, the origins of the threats and the best means of addressing those threats have changed, and they need to be properly assessed.

For instance, we have only recently fully acknowledged the real and increasing threat of climate change, which our Pacific friends now list as their number one threat. By far the most devastating recent event for NZ has been the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are now learning about threats from artificial intelligence, social media, misinformation, species extinction, ocean degradation and many other factors. These threats are not due to attacks of one country on another, but rather outcomes of our collective behaviour. The only solution to these threats is cooperative action—working with other nations as friends, not treating them as enemies.

New Zealand has built a reputation on making friends, taking constructive action, speaking up for peace. We need to focus on these as well as on our many products that feed and nurture people, not industries that lead to death and destruction. This is our strength, these are our skills, and this is where we should invest our energy, our money, and our hopes.