

FACT SHEET

SHARING LEVELS OF NATIONAL MILITARY EXPENDITURES

Countries can report to the United Nations their military spending of the previous year. Such transparency may increase confidence within regions and beyond. By making the figures publicly available, the UN encourages their verification and analysis.

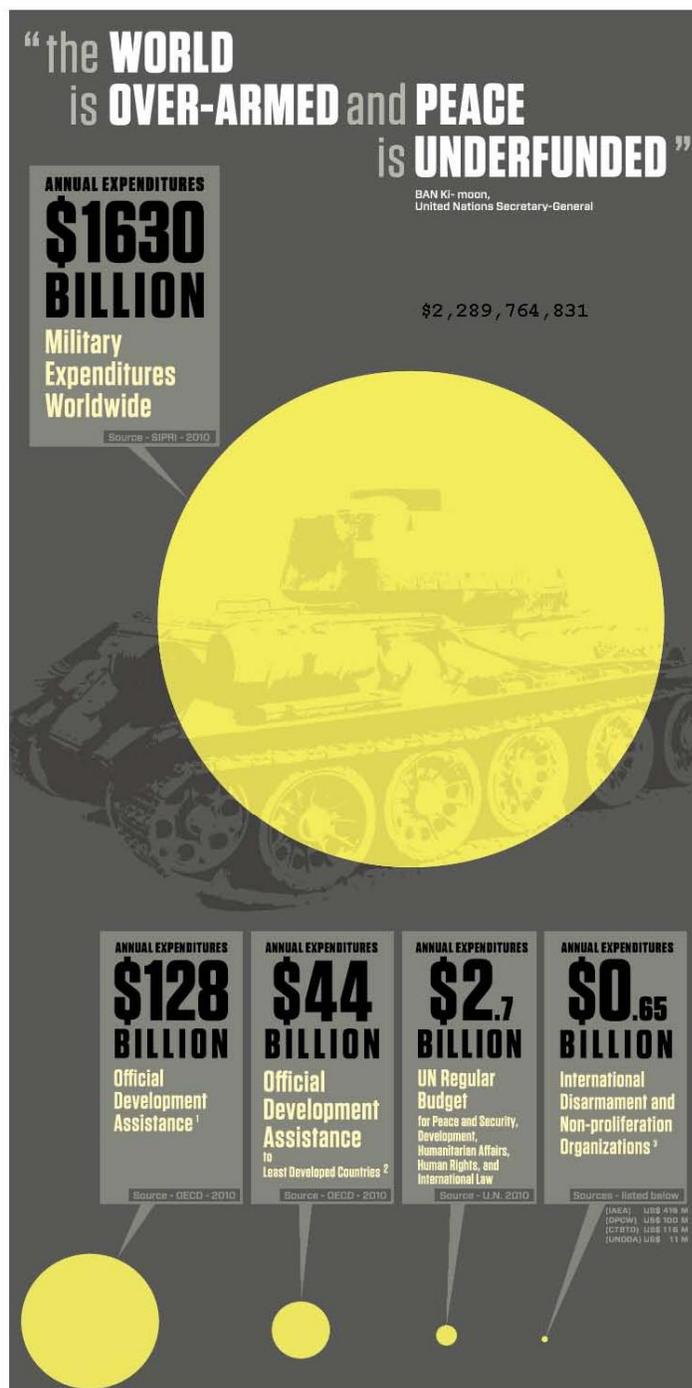
Limiting military spending?

Over the past century, governments have tried finding ways to come to globally agreed reductions in military expenditures. They did so in the League of Nations, and later in the UN. Early proposals in the UN focused on reducing the expenditures of militarily important States, freeing up funds for development aid.

Focus on transparency

Such proposals proved unfeasible. However, they did prompt the General Assembly to develop, in 1981, the UN Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures—recently renamed *United Nations Report on Military Expenditures*—under which countries are encouraged to report on their military budgets.

The original goal—to facilitate reduction of the biggest military budgets—was abandoned even before the report's template was fully developed. The agreed application of the Instrument has been as a *transparency measure*, aimed at promoting confidence-building among all States. If submitted every year, this information provides insight on military spending patterns and leads to increased international trust and security.



Building trust

Sharing military budgets is important for increasing trust between governments anywhere in the world. But having this information available is only the first step in confidence building. As a follow-up measure, authorities from different countries may wish to meet and discuss their respective military budgets, e.g. within their regional contexts. As not many regions have such mechanisms in place, UNODA stands ready to assist regional organizations in making such confidence-building talks a reality.

Military confidence-building in post-conflict settings

Transparency in military matters is important anywhere in the world. States in regions coming out of conflict, newly independent countries and their neighbours, and states in regions with a perceived high level of military spending are among those that may particularly benefit from using the UN Report on Military Expenditures. For countries where defence sector reform is planned, reporting current military spending by category of expenditure may provide a baseline assessment of present priorities, which can constitute a sensible and transparent start of the reform process.

Fact:

Making sure that military spending does not become excessive, is an agreed norm

The founders of the United Nations included in the UN Charter a provision for “the establishment of international peace and security through the least diversion of the world’s human and economic resources to armaments” (Art. 26).

“Global military spending [amounts to] more than \$4.6 billion a day, which alone is almost twice the UN's budget for an entire year. This level of military spending is hard to explain in a post-Cold War world and amidst a global financial crisis. Economists would call this an 'opportunity cost'. I call it: human opportunities lost.”

BAN Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary-General

How to report?

Reporting to the UN Report on Military Expenditures can only be done by governments, using an agreed reporting template.

States with small or no military expenditures can make use of the simplified form or a “nil report”. Other states use the standardized reporting form.

The appropriate forms are at:
[www.un.org / disarmament / convarms /
milex](http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/milex)

All information received from countries is made available on this website.

UNODA stands ready to assist States with their national report. We also work with regional organizations – upon request – on organising military confidence-building activities.

Contact conventionalarms-unoda@un.org.

www.un.org/disarmament