

Naturefriends for Peace

Resolution of the 10th Annual Conference of Naturefriends International (NFI)

Heerlen, the Netherlands | 14th of September 2024

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine launched in 2022 and Israel's military response to the Hamas terrorist attack in October 2023 led to numerous public calls for peace. All calls were unanimous in their objective: the weapons should be silenced, and civilian suffering ended. However, there were and still are differing opinions how these goals should be achieved and who bears responsibility for the devastating conflicts.

Economic boycott of Russia, support for Ukraine, protection of the Palestinian civil population versus total extinction of the Hamas movement? Each of these aspects divides the peace movement and thus prevents a common all-encompassing position.

Naturefriends are part of the modern peace movement from the very beginning.

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 ended the II. World War, but at the same time it was clear that the global arms race had entered a new era. The military powers endeavoured to deploy lethal nuclear weapons or to develop tactical nuclear weapons that would enable a limited nuclear war in addition to a strategic nuclear strike. This lurking danger was the birth of a new peace movement.

"Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to mankind."

John F. Kennedy

The first campaigns by peace activists took place in the United Kingdom "to assist the conducting of non-violent direct action to obtain the total renunciation of nuclear war and its weapons by Britain and all other countries as a first step in disarmament". The "British Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War" organised a march from London to the Aldermaston nuclear research centre at Easter 1958, mobilising around 10,000 people against nuclear armament. This political action inspired many people in Germany, including Naturefriends, who took the lead of the German peace movement (see Annex). This period was also the peak of the worldwide protests against the Vietnam War, which was one of the main triggers of the student movements in the USA and Europe, too.

From 1970 onwards, the peace movement became even more internationalised. Following the development of the neutron bomb and the NATO Double-Track Decision in 1979 (deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe and simultaneous demands for negotiations to limit these missiles), there were many large peace demonstrations in Europe and the USA with more than five million participants.



The Easter march movement continued and Naturefriends Germany regularly called on people to take part. In recent years, Naturefriends Germany have developed a new form of protest in the form of nationwide hikes for peace.

Such as Naturefriends Germany, many other Naturefriends organisations are taking an active part in the peace movement. Naturefriends Greece, for instance, have been active in anti-war events and campaigning against nuclear weapons for a long time and became official partner of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in 2022.

The world has not become more peaceful.

The peace movement has still not been able to prevent further armament in the world. Military spending worldwide totalled 2.44 trillion US dollars in 2023, with the USA alone accounting for 916 billion (37.5 %). China (296 billion), Russia (109 billion), India (83.6 billion), Saudi Arabia (75,8 billion), the United Kingdom (74.9 billion), Germany (66.8 billion), Ukraine (64,8 billion), France (61.3 billion), Japan (50,2 billion), and South Korea with 47.9 billion US dollars are the next biggest spenders. In 2024, the number of nuclear warheads totalled 5,580 in Russia and 5,044 in the USA, meaning that these two countries combined possess approximately 88 percent of the world's total inventory of nuclear weapons (12,121 in total). The other countries possessing nuclear warheads are China (500), France (290), the United Kingdom (225), India (172), Pakistan (170), Israel (90), and North Korea (50).

Unfortunately, most people have become accustomed to this nuclear threat and the concept of safety through deterrence, believing that no rational head of state would ever press the red button that would trigger a global nuclear missile squadron. However, this overlooks the fact that the military has long had tactical nuclear weapons at its disposal, which also allow for limited nuclear war. And since Russia's attack on Ukraine at the latest, it is highly doubtful that all decision-makers are driven by rational motives.

It is also often overlooked that nuclear weapons technology cannot be kept secret forever – after all, India, Pakistan, and North Korea have already gained access to the club of nuclear powers, Iran is working on it, and it cannot be ruled out that at some point terrorist groups will also come into possession of these weapons and blackmail the world community.

All of this is taking place against the backdrop of impending global crises over water, food, and other limited resources, which could lead to armament being perceived as an opportunity by countries that are disadvantaged in the global competition for distribution.

A ban of nuclear weapons and global disarmament are urgently needed to make our world a safer place.

On 7 July 2017 – following a decade of advocacy by International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and its partners – an overwhelming majority of the world's nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It entered into force on 22 January 2021 and fills a significant gap in international law. It prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory.

There are currently 93 signatories and 70 states parties (see: <https://www.icanw.org/>). Naturefriends encourage all countries to join!

There is no “justified” war.

Wars are not a force of nature. They are organised and carried out by people, whereby the responsibility lies with the heads of state and government: they decide on armament and disarmament as well as the objectives of the global machinery of violence.

The people affected by these planned scenarios of destruction are their own population – as targets of enemy fire or as soldiers on the front line. The idea that destruction would only ever affect the enemy is a military idealism that not even the most stubborn generals themselves believe in. The winners of wars are the military, elites and arms industry; the losers are the population, with socially disadvantaged people being the hardest hit.

Even if we succeed in waging wars in a limited space, these wars do not lead to a solution of any problems. They only shift the balance of power between different territories and population groups and thus create reasons for counter reactions.

War and armament cost masses of money – money that would be urgently needed to act against serious global problems, from hunger to the threat of climate collapse.

Securing resources and influence – an outdated strategy.

In the age of globalisation with economy only functioning well through coordinated cooperation, archaic strategies of conquering certain resources or territories are long outdated. This can also be seen in the ineffectiveness of the many trade wars – either you can't do without the enemy's resources, or they find other customers who don't support an embargo. Our economies are mutually dependent on the unequally distributed raw material resources in the world, so that only peaceful cooperation can lead to global prosperity.

The European peace model needs to be strengthened.

The European Union was founded to promote peaceful cooperation and to banish armed conflicts on European soil forever. This model is now under threat. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the export of major weapons in Europe doubled between 2019 and 2023. According to the London-based think tank IISS, in 2020, no country apart from the USA spent as much on the military as the 27 EU member states combined, namely 227 billion dollars. The rearmament measures decided in the individual member states are already clearly leading to financial problems in the individual budgets, which will inevitably lead to cuts in all other areas of responsibility (e.g. health care, education, provision of affordable housing etc.) which will then be at the expense of the population and future generations. The arms and war industry do not create a common good but are a lost drain on national wealth. Based on its positive experience with the peace dividend, Europe should actively bring itself into play as a force for peace and thus contribute to an end of wars and armed conflicts.

The power of the peace movement!

The vicious circle of armament and armed conflict can only be broken by a broad global peace movement. A peace movement demanding that governments and institutions invest in measures that resolve conflicts and facilitate peaceful cooperation instead of armament. The respective international forums and organizations exist; they can be further expanded, but above all they must be used. Without pressure from the population, little is likely to change. The aim of the peace movement must be to reduce the potential for war, regardless of whether a war is currently being waged or not. As soon as a war or armed conflict has broken out, the main demand must be to stop it for the time being. Who is responsible and what measures are to be taken should then be clarified in neutrally conducted peace negotiations. It is not the task of the peace movement to commit itself to concrete and detailed goals and solutions, but to break through the logic of war and lobby for a stop of the military and other warlike action.

Naturefriends demand:

- the immediate stop of the military and other warlike action on all sides;
- the immediate start of negotiations under a neutral facilitating institution like for example the United Nations, which is accepted by the conflicting parties;
- the support of refugees, war resisters, and the civil population suffering from military and warlike action;
- the support of peace activists worldwide;
- the signing and ratification of the “Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons” by all governments.

Naturefriends International, as the representative of more than 350,000 members, with its more than 125 years of commitment to internationality, tolerance, non-violence, and social justice will endeavour to support a peaceful future for all people.

Annex

The role of German Naturefriends in the peace movement

As early as 1959, the Hessian Young Naturefriends organised a "First Peace March from Hanau-Sternheim to Offenbach am Main" on the occasion of their regional meeting. One of the organisers was Klaus Vack, who was elected youth secretary of the Hessian Naturefriends in 1958 and went on to support plan and organise eight Easter marches from 1961 onwards. In response to the testing of nuclear missiles at the Bergen military training area, pacifists organised the first Easter march in 1960 with around 1,200 participants. But as early as 1958, there was a broad campaign by the SPD and trade unions against the rearmament of the Federal Republic: the mass rallies on 17 April 1958 in Bremen, Kiel, Munich, Mannheim, Dortmund, Essen and Hamburg mobilised a total of 1.5 million participants.

Klaus Vack and the Hessian Young Naturefriends continued to play a central role in the Easter marches between 1961 and 1970: Vack became Secretary of the Central Committee of the Easter March Movement in 1965, and the movement was managed by a joint office in which the Hessian Young Naturefriends was also based. Many celebrities joined the movement, including Robert Jungk, Ernst Rowohlt, Erich Kästner and Bertrand Russel. One of the highlights of the 1966 Easter march was certainly the participation of Joan Baez.