

CHRISTIAN CAMPAIGNERS CALL FOR CHURCH HOUSE TO BOYCOTT THE ARMS TRADE

A coalition of Christian campaigners have called for the Church of England to stop facilitating arms trade events. This follows the announcement that Church House, the headquarters of the Church of England, will be hosting an event attended by some of the largest arms companies in the world.

The *Chief of the Air Staff's Air Power Conference*, taking place in Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, on **09-10 July** will have a focus on aerial weaponry. The event will be addressed by the Secretary of State for Defence, Philip Hammond MP, and is sponsored and attended by a number of arms companies, including BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin and Finmeccanica.

Church House Conference Centre is part of Church House, the building that houses the administrative headquarters of the Church Commissioners, the Archbishops' Council and other parts of the Church of England. The Conference Centre is a wholly owned subsidiary company of the Church House Corporation, whose president is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Pat Gaffney of Pax Christi said: *"A number of Christians are very concerned about this event. The Church of England's ethical investment policy includes 'conscientiousness with regard to human rights' as one of its criteria. How then can it host and accept income from some of the largest arms exporting companies whose weapons are used to abuse the rights of others?"*

Unfortunately this is not the first time that the arms trade has held an event in Church House Conference Centre. For example, a similar conference took place in November 2012 and was met with opposition from Christian activists, who sent letters to Church House Conference Centre and to the Archbishop of Canterbury. A prayer vigil outside Church House took place on the morning of the Conference.

Emma Anthony, of Fellowship of Reconciliation, said: *"The Church is kidding itself when it says that RUSI is an independent security think tank. In reality, they're anything but independent as they couldn't exist without funding from the arms industry. There is no way, with those sponsors, that these conferences are anything other than the repugnant preparation for war. The Church should reject this process, let alone facilitate it."*

Symon Hill of the Campaign Against Arms Trade Christian Network said: *"The arms companies are not hiring Church House Conference Centre because they want to be nice, or to support the Church. They are doing it because it's good for their business. By agreeing to host them Church House Conference Centre is supporting the arms trade by giving practical support and a veneer of legitimacy to an industry that profits from death and destruction."*

Campaigners will be holding a silent vigil on **Wednesday 9 July between 11.00 and 12.00** noon in The Sanctuary, in front of Westminster Abbey.

End

The vigil is being supported by Fellowship of Reconciliation, Pax Christi, Campaign Against Arms Trade Christian Network, Christian CND, Christianity Uncut and SPEAK

For further information please contact Pat Gaffney on coordinator@paxchristi.org.uk

On the day call 07522 370839