

# PEOPLE POWERED PEACE

*A general election briefing from The Fellowship of Reconciliation*

## Overview

The 2024 General Election happens when the world seems perilously pointed towards continuous warfare. In the month the election was called, there was a failed coup in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, increased military rehearsals in the Taiwan Straits and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza grind on.

This election allows us to engage with our future MPs and challenge them on how they respond to this increased insecurity. Will they add fuel to the flames by increasing military spending? Or will they invest in long-term peace through bottom-up, people leading peace and security activity? And will they use their place in Parliament to speak up for the right of everyone to stand up for peace through non-violent protest?

This briefing will help you engage your local candidates on 4 key peace questions. You can also email them via our website [www.for.org.uk/election2024](http://www.for.org.uk/election2024). We encourage you to share with us their responses so we can support you to engage them in the years ahead.

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## Fund Peace, Don't Fuel War

Military spending shows the cost of war but what is the price of peace? Military spending in the UK and in many Western Nations has significantly increased since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

The UK now has core military spending of £52.4bn, approx. £100,000 a minute. This has been steadily rising since 2021. In contrast to this Official Development Assistance (what we often call Overseas Aid) was cut and is now approx. £11.1bn. The headline figure is higher however the increased figure includes 28% of funding spent on hosting refugees in the UK.

The root causes of conflict are rarely that someone else has larger weapons. Questions of access to fossil fuels, long-held questions over 'ownership' of land and more all lead to conflict. In an era where it is often paramilitaries and other non-state actors engaging in conflict then we need to be increasing investment in building up social good around the globe, through investing in support for nations to build up housing, healthcare, education and democracy.

That cannot be delivered through bombs and bullets, therefore we need to put in place government-level spending on the things that make for peace. This can be achieved by meeting the 0.7% target on Overseas Aid spending, and to commit to spending that overseas. That increase, far smaller

than increasing the Military Spending Budget enforces a view held by 10% of the public that increased Development Spending creates not just a safer world but a safer Britain.

## Raise a Voice for Peace

Due to Britain's historic legacy of colonialism then it holds many important global roles, including at the United Nations, this is because it was a major geopolitical player when many modern international political spaces were created.

It is important that we use spaces to advocate and support initiatives that build peace, rather than further imbed imbalances of power that only hold until the next conflict starts.

Therefore we urge the next Government to create special representative for peace who will keep peace on the agenda within our Government and through this influence our international diplomatic efforts as well.

The current conflict in Gaza has shown clearly the limits of having no public spokesperson for peace, and the urgency of having such a voice.

## Investing in People-Powered Peace

Governments are not the only way to build peace. People-powered peace is the key to building a more secure world

Many International Fellowship of Reconciliation partners are involved in the slow work of creating and building peace.

This includes running training in nonviolent communication and conflict de-escalation in nations such as India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Alongside this our partners in Colombia support the long held peace communities who support peasant farmers to go about their lives in peace, in rejection to the paramilitary lead conflict seen all around.

It is important that any future security analysis carried out by government recognises that peace cannot be imposed. Instead it grows up when people have time and space to engage with each other and are legally supported to defend their rights.

### **A space to protest**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal recognises the importance of accountability with institutions when building peace and a more just world. The last decade has seen various pieces of legislation enacted which restrict the space in which civil society is able to function. Most recently the Police and Crime Bill was criticised by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who said: ' As the

### **QUESTIONS**

**If your party forms the next Government will you:**

- 1) increase overseas aid spending as a priority?**
- 2) establish the role of a Special Representative for Peace within the FCDO, to promote a positive vision of peace.**
- 3) Include and promote community-lead peace education and training as part of any future security review**
- 4) protect the right to protest and recognise that (nonviolent) disruption is a price we pay for having a democracy in the country?**

world faces the triple planetary crises of climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution, governments should be protecting and facilitating peaceful protests on such existential topics, not hindering and blocking them<sup>1</sup>

The impact of various policies has already been felt by the public. Open research carried out by Rethinking Security in 2023 identified what it called a 'crisis of confidence in governance and government from the public<sup>2</sup>. At the heart of the concerns raised was an understanding that those marginalised in society were sidelined or scapegoated by those in power. This was seen, among other things, by restrictions on the rights of protest. Government rhetoric around the need to restrict protest always centres around 'everyday' people having their 'everyday' activities disrupted, yet it is the lack of space to raise and be listened to that moves people into non violent action<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore after a decade of seeking to restrict and reduce civil society space to protest and lobby it is time to reverse this trend and create a more conversational environment in which all people are listened to and a diverse range of voices heard.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/04/1136107>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/An-Analysis-of-Responses-to-an-Open-Call-for-Evidence-on-Security-in-the-UK-1.pdf>

This briefing has been compiled to enable members and supporters of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to engage candidates from all parties during the General Election 2024. It does not seek to endorse any one party and was published on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The Fellowship of Reconciliation is a registered charity (England and Wales) number 207822. Registered address: Peace House, 19 Paradise Street, Oxford, OX1 1LD

<sup>3</sup> This is clearly covered in the global research carried out by International Alert in 2018 where the ability for people to resolve disputes without violence was highlighted as a key factor to building peace