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The U.S. Capitol is seen Dec. 6 in Washington. (CNS/Reuters/Elizabeth Frantz)



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In this holy Advent season, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus our savior, who commands his followers to put away the sword, love one another, renounce killing and be nonviolent peacemakers, the U.S. Congress recently passed a bill that prepares the way for more suffering, death and destruction.

On Dec. 15, the Senate passed the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, that authorizes $768 billion for military spending, including about $28 billion to fund the Energy Department's nuclear weapons programs. This was a $25 billion increase over President Joe Biden's defense budget request for 2022 and, according to Democracy Now, is the largest military spending bill since World War II.

In an earlier Dec. 7 vote, the House of Representatives approved the act by 364-70, with only 51 Democrats and 19 Republicans voting against it. Biden is now expected to sign the measure in the coming days.

In this time of pandemic and peril, when the ranks of the poor and homeless are increasing; when there are an estimated 140 million poor and low-income Americans, according to the new Poor People's Campaign; when basic human services to meet urgent human needs are being cut; when inadequate measures are being taken to halt the climate crisis; when millions of people worldwide lack the basic necessities of life and, as a result, die prematurely, this exorbitant military spending is an abomination — an affront to God and a colossal crime against the poor.

Moreover, the NDAA serves to reinforce a system of white supremacy and domination nationally and globally, while benefitting and increasing the profits of weapons contractors and arms dealers.

Fabricated national security threats from Russia and China are being promulgated by U.S. officials to justify this dramatic spending increase. The truth is that the Pentagon is committed to military domination on earth and space, and it will spend whatever is necessary and use whatever military force is needed to achieve its imperial aims.

Recent examples include protracted U.S. wars and occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan and intervention in other countries which, over the last 20 years, have resulted in

over 900,000 deaths and a cost of an estimated $8 trillion. God Forgive U.S.!

This is further evidenced by the United States' refusal to adopt a no first-use nuclear policy, its projected 30-year $1.7 trillion nuclear modernization program now underway, a new Space Force, an estimated 800 bases worldwide, and a military budget greater than the next ten countries combined, including rivals China and Russia, and allies such as Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and France.

The 70 congressional representatives who voted against this bill are to be commended, along with the many religious communities and grassroots groups and organizations who are actively working to convert the war economy and bring about racial, economic, environmental and social justice and the abolition of war and all weapons.

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But where is the massive public outcry regarding this misappropriation of money and resources? Why haven't the U.S. bishops, leaders of all faith denominations and the people of God everywhere unequivocally denounced this immoral military spending bill? How many more people have to suffer and die because of the idolatry of militarism and nuclearism?

Over five decades ago Martin Luther King Jr. declared: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." We can avoid spiritual death by demanding that these funds and all other government funds be used to serve the common good and life, not destruction!

Pope Francis, in his 2021 World Day of Peace message with the theme "A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace," offered such an appeal. He wrote: "How many resources are spent on weaponry, especially nuclear weapons, that could be used for more significant priorities such as ensuring the safety of individuals, the promotion of peace and integral human development, the fight against poverty, and the provision of health care."

Francis also repeated his earlier call for the creation of a new international fund that would reappropriate "the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, in order to permanently eliminate hunger and contribute to the development of the

poorest countries."

Related: Francis urges world leaders to reduce military spending in 2021 peace message

Now is the time for all followers of Jesus to embrace Gospel nonviolence, resist all violence and killing, and stand for life and creation wherever they are threatened. Now is the time to rise up and demand an end to this sinful misuse of resources for weapons, war, the exploitation of the earth's resources, the destruction of the environment for profit, and political and economic domination!

Clergy and laity of the Catholic Church and of all denominations should follow the pope's lead and call on all public officials to help create his proposed global fund. We must act in solidarity with all those who are working for nonviolent social transformation, which includes converting the U.S. war economy to a peace economy; ending economic inequality, eradicating what King described as the triple evils of poverty, racism and militarism; ratifying the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, enacting the Green New Deal; banning torture and state-sanctioned killing; and upholding the human rights of all people.

I thank God for the many people and groups across the religious and political spectrum who are working tirelessly to challenge and resist a power structure rooted in systemic racism, oppression and violence, and who are committed to making the Word flesh, establish God's reign of justice and love, and bringing about the beloved community.

During this holy season let us follow Jesus's peacemaking mandate and act in the hope that he prescribes: "All things are possible for one who has faith."