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STATE OF THE WORLD

Dear friends,

I do wish you all the very best at the beginning of this new year!

Existential threats

Whilst wishing this wholeheartedly, I am at the same time full of fear. Fear that we will have a continuation of the annus horribilis 2022, fear of a fatal third world war with use of nuclear weapons; fear that the devastation both of climate and nature will be more and more harmful and make it difficult to live on this our one and only, blue and beautiful, planet; fear that the inequalities will grow with a few billionaires and multinational corporations possessing more than all the working people of the world, with the result that an alarming number of people will die from poverty, hunger and misery, and fear that decision-makers will not, or are not able to, stop the huge, quantitative modernization of nuclear weapons, able to wipe out life on earth many, many times around.

When facing existential threats of this magnitude, the rational answer is to collectively search for strategies to halt and stop these threatening developments. But “no”, instead we see a militarization unlike anything we have seen before. And, this excessive military spending cannot provide the security we want. The military actually makes us less safe, both economically and ecologically, by taking so much of the resources and land that are needed for other purposes and by the enormous greenhouse gas emissions, radiation and pollution it brings. The military must not be allowed to continue to make these heavy and damaging boot prints on the soil, the water, the air and even the atmosphere. Military “security” does not provide peace, but peace provides security! So peace must be put above security, the UN above any military alliance.

The example of Norway

Also my home-country Norway is militarizing and thereby adds to the sensitivities also in the High North. Military spending is going dramatically up to meet the minimum 2% of GDP

requirements of NATO. "We" participate in NATO "operations" in distant countries with whom we have no problems; we change our policy vis-à-vis foreign military bases on Norwegian soil, allowing, without using the word "military base", both USA and NATO bases (and often it is not obvious what is NATO and what is USA); we alter our rules for sales of weapons, providing weapons and war equipment to countries in war like Ukraine; accept and participate in ever more frequent and bigger allied military exercises and further north, towards the border with Russia; we accept nuclear submarines in certain harbours without checking properly if they have nuclear weapons on board; provide subsidies and huge assignments to the war industry thereby contributing to the acceleration of the arms race; Norway is not signing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Arms due to our membership in NATO; we participate in sanctions against Russia in order to weaken its military capacity, but with the risk of harming dramatically the Russian people and also a longstanding friendly cooperation between our countries, and we keep huge parts of the military climate and environmental destruction outside climate budgets. Cry my beloved country, the Nobel Peace Prize country, the country of solidarity, that used to consider being a peaceful and friendly country and a strong UN partner as the best security measure. How can changes come so abruptly – or is it not so abrupt, but just outside the public eye?

What are the alternative strategies?

It is obviously not easy to avoid being overwhelmed by the multiple, interlinked and existential crises facing humanity. Giving in to pessimism and apathy will, however, take us nowhere. We cannot allow the destruction of humanity and our planet. There is no alternative to involvement and to being solution-oriented. It might be difficult to find the right strategies, both on a personal, national and international level without a vision of what kind of society we would like to have and be a part of say in 20, 30 or 50 years and how we want to contribute. One thing is, however, obvious: we cannot continue to misuse the world's resources, natural, financial and intellectual, for military purposes. Without a serious disarmament effort, the world will not be able to realize neither the UN Sustainable Development Goals nor the Paris Agreement on climate and the new, landmark Montreal Agreement on biodiversity.

Nuclear arms

The very existence of weapons of mass destruction makes the risks of the confrontation in Ukraine particularly high. Both Russian and NATO (American, British and French) nuclear weapons are at play, so are nuclear power plants. No diplomatic and peace-making initiatives should be untried! The suggestion of Nobel peace prize laureate Oscar Arias should be welcomed. He suggests that the US withdraws its nuclear weapons from Europe against a Russian promise not to bring nuclear weapons to Belarus. Instead, and totally against the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the US is now sending upgraded nuclear bombs to their bases in Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Turkey, probably also with plans for Poland and England. It will certainly not diminish the tension in Europe and should be strongly rejected! As the UN Secretary General, *António Guterres*, stated 1.08.22: *We have been extraordinarily lucky so far. But luck is not a strategy... Today, humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation,*

### Questioning NATO

NATO, established in 1947, can no longer be considered a North Atlantic defence organisation. It is by far the most powerful military alliance ever. It has global ambitions and fight aggressive wars “out-of-area.” The first NATO Secretary General, Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, defined the goal of NATO to be: “To keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down”. Seemingly not so very different from what we are presently experiencing. Paragraph 5 is considered the security guarantee of all the 30 member states, one for all, all for one. But what does it mean to be protected by NATO? Do we risk being bombed back to the Middle Ages in case of confrontation? To me, the most important paragraph in the North Atlantic treaty is paragraph 13, which says that you can withdraw by informing the US government, who will inform the others!

### “Patriotism” versus pacifism?

War is obsolete and should never be an option; it kills and maims, destroys infrastructure and livelihoods and sends millions on the run. It should be in the dustbin of history. Yet, war is again close also to us and war rhetoric and war logic overshadow almost everything. The strong polarization in society affects and divides families, friends, progressive political parties and even the peace movement. A major dividing line is between those who believe that more weapons to Ukraine is necessary and those of us who think

that if weapons could create peace, we would have had world peace long ago and that we instead need to put all our energy, competence and creativity into searching for peaceful and durable solutions, even placing peace before being right. An exceptionally strong war propaganda with enemy images, demonization and suspicion has created a dilemma between “patriotism” and pacifism, between being within mainstream thinking or risking to be labelled quite brutally as somebody running the errands of the “enemy”.

#### Disinformation

The space left for freedom of expression has been seriously limited by the war in Ukraine, which has brought us back to the black and white thinking of George W. Bush when he proclaimed in relation to “the war against terror”: *You are either with us or against us*. Even though it is not obvious how to effectively fight fake news and propaganda, we need to stop looking at “the others” as deranged and dangerous enemies. Provocative and humiliating rhetoric is hampering international dialogue.

Both politicians and the media seem more interested in listening to the war-movement and war-logic than to the peace-movement. Non-violent solutions are hardly worthy of any media coverage. Even so-called ordinary people in the West call on NATO, more than on the UN. The funding of the peace movement is also at a record low and the Covid-19 pandemic has to a large extent kept people out of the streets, hampering efforts for diplomatic solutions to be heard.

#### Common security

The security concept needs redefinition to be more in line with human security, food and health security, as well as common security. The common security concept was outlined by the Palme commission 40 years back and reiterated in the excellent report *Common Security 2022: For our shared future* by the International Peace Bureau, the International Trade Union Corporation and the International Olof Palme Centre. The plan is built on well-known UN principles, such as freedom from fear and need, disarmament and confidence-building measures, respect for international law, dialogue and conflict prevention measures. It insists on the importance that nobody is safe unless everybody is safe, as experienced also in the context of the covid-19 pandemic.

#### Culture of peace

The UN/UNESCO culture of peace concept was groundbreaking and a blueprint for an alternative security policy and should be re-launched. The culture of peace vision emphasizes peace not only as the absence of armed conflict or war, however important that is, but focuses on the content and the conditions of peace. The culture of peace requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation.

The suffering and horrors of war are weighing us all down. Not only are people dying and infrastructure devastated. Additionally, the multilateral system is weakened and risks failing humanity and the vision of a world without war. More than ever we need to strengthen the different parts of the UN system, strengthen people's sense of being a world citizen and highlight the vision of a world based on the principles of a culture of peace. Imagine, 8 days of the world military expenditure would be enough to provide 12 years free quality education to all the children of the world!

#### Peace education

Education is vital to the quest for a culture of peace. Peace and non-violent conflict resolution should be taught in the regular school system as well as outside - through organisations, training courses and ways of living. Unfortunately most school systems today encourage competition and prepare for hierarchical structures, instead of training in cooperation and mutual understanding. Countering the on-going, growing and sometimes aggressive militarization of the mind, in schools, in universities and through mass media, is vital.

#### Non-violent resistance

The researcher Erica Chenoweth showed in the study "Why civil resistance works" that non-violent actions are twice as successful in reaching their goals than actions allowing the use of force and weapons. Research also shows that for peace negotiations to be sustainable they must take as point of departure the real and fundamental problems at hand. Involving the local, affected people, is essential. When women participate in peace negotiations the agreements last much longer than if only the warring parties are at the table.

It is high time to replace society's the old patriarchal model of economic growth, militarism, domination, competition, control and confrontation, prioritizing warfare

over welfare, which risks ultimately to lead into apocalypse, and instead build trust and international solidarity. A true feminist foreign policy could hopefully get us out of the one-eyed patriarchal power-structures still dominating international politics.

We cannot let pro-military propaganda make us believe that we need a strong military defence. The world needs healing, beauty, justice, compromise and pacifistic thinking. Good role models and good examples are important for inspiration. Costa Rica is one of the few countries that have closed down their military force and instead spend their money on meeting the needs of their people for a sound environment, and good education and health systems.