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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

ARMS FOR THE POOR

Maryknoll World Productions (1998: 25 minutes)

Edited transcription by Darrell Moen

NARRATOR: "We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence by the military industrial-complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist." (Dwight Eisenhower)

NARRATOR: During the Cold War, the United States sold weapons to any country that might be an ally against the Soviet Union. Now that the Soviet threat has evaporated, Why has the United States doubled it's arms sales? Why have we become the number one exporter in the world, selling more weaponry than all the other 52 exporting nations combined? And why are 80% of our exports sold to non- democratic countries?

JACK SHANAHAN: We're arming the world to the teeth and when people get all those weapons they're going to say, "My God, now we have all these weapons, we'd better use some of them on someone."

KEN RUTHERFORD: In Somalia, I saw young teenagers high on drugs carrying American guns.

CYNTHIA MCKINNEY: That we give in the tens of thousands of dollars per capita to developing countries the means by which the few impose their will on the many is morally wrong. And it is also the height of insensitivity that some of the poorest countries in the world are some of the largest and most consistent recipients of our weapons.

DR. ARIAS: As long as you keep selling arms to developing countries, you are perpetuating poverty.

BISHOP GUMBLETON: People say, "It's not our responsibility what's happening. Those countries should take care of their own people." But they can't because there

really is a global kind of economy that is causing wealth to move from the poor to the rich.

DR. FORBES: It is almost as if we and our interests must be viewed as God and all of the rest of the earth serve this God of this American Economy

CHUNG HYUN-KYUNG: And your economy is based on inflicting pain on other peoples' lives. So, I ask, where is God in your country?

NARRATOR: For the last three decades the United States has been the major weapons supplier to the Suharto government in Indonesia, one of the most brutal and repressive governments in the world. In 1975, when Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger visited Indonesia, General Suharto asked them what the United States would do if Indonesia invaded East Timor, a small island between Indonesia and Australia. Ford and Kissinger said that the United States wouldn't do anything, even though they knew that the invasion of East Timor would not only be a violation of a UN resolution, but also a violation of a treaty between the United States and Indonesia prohibiting the sale of any weapons that would be used for aggressive purposes. Forty-eight hours after Ford and Kissinger gave Suharto the green light, Indonesia launched a massive assault on East Timor. Tens of thousands of troops, by air and by sea, bombarded the island.

CHARLIE SCHEINER: The worst killings took place over the first five years when Indonesian military killed about a third of the people of East Timor, about 200,000 people, which is proportionately the highest genocide since the Nazi holocaust.

SCHEINER: I think the turning point came when on November 12, 1991, when thousands of people in East Timor decided that they were going to speak out peacefully for independence in East Timor against the Indonesian occupation. Soldiers marched up in formation, raised their US supplied M16's, and started firing.

ALLAN NAIRN: They raised their rifles to their shoulders and opened fire into the crowd. At first I didn't want to believe this. I thought, 'well, it must be blanks.' But then I saw the blood, people were buckling, blood was everywhere, the soldiers would leap over those who were down and pick off survivors, hitting them in the back

ALLAN NAIRN: The people whose names you are wearing were having their limbs scattered on the road.

SCHEINER: They killed about 270 people that day. They tried to kill all the witnesses. They went to hospitals, military hospitals where the wounded were being cared for, and they poisoned them. They injected sulfuric acid into people's veins in the hospitals to kill them.

ALLAN NAIRN: Then a group of seven or eight soldiers put their rifles to our heads and were deciding whether or not to execute us. They were shouting "Political, political!" We were shouting back "America, America, we're from America." And it seemed that when we actually convinced them that we were from the US, that's what turned the tide because we were from the country their weapons were from. I think these officers realized there might be a price to pay for executing Americans. They'd never paid a price for executing Timorese, they'd been rewarded for executing Timorese with new US weapons from the Bush administration, from the Reagan administration, from Ford, from Carter.

CONSTANCIO PINTO: I was tortured from nine in the morning until one o'clock in the morning of the next day. I just couldn't believe that even though they saw blood was running out from my nose and my eyes and my ears, they still kept torturing me. I just couldn't believe how human beings could treat another human being like that. Americans, I think, should know that the US government is using their taxpayer money to help Indonesia conduct genocide in East Timor.

CHARLIE SCHEINER: If there were ever war crimes trials for the Indonesian military, I think that Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan and George Bush and Bill Clinton should also be in the defendants' dock. But I think also, all the rest of us ordinary Americans share some of that responsibility.

NARRATOR: Sixty four thousand American soldiers were killed or injured by landmines in Vietnam. Ninety percent of those landmines were American made. In Cambodia, one out of every 236 people is an amputee. This is a surprisingly low figure given the fact that there are more landmines in Cambodia than there are people; an estimated 10 million landmines and a population of 9.9 million.

CHUNG HYUN-KYUNG: There is some way we have to stop this madness. In order to ban landmines in the world, we have to take out landmines in our heart first. As an Asian person I believe in karma: what goes around, comes around. If you inflict so much pain and violence on the people in other countries, eventually it will come back to your family, your own neighborhood. I can see it is happening in the USA. So I ask - What is the spiritual ground of the USA? You talk about democracy and freedom and being the #1 country in the world.

NARRATOR: Cambodia is just one of 69 countries that is littered with landmines. There are more than 100 million landmines in the world. They cause 70 deaths or injuries per day, 500 per week. They maim or kill 26,000 people per year. The victims are overwhelmingly civilians, very often children.

KEN: If I could talk to President Clinton, I would say, "President Clinton, if there were landmines in Little Rock, Arkansas, you'd be crazy to go back home in the year 2000. I

wouldn't. As part of my job, I was training Somalis on how to manage credit unions. And one day, we went out, myself and my Somali staff and several Somali refugees to visit their project site for which they had applied for a loan. And on the way out, the car blew up. It was full of dust and I looked to my Somali colleague who was sitting to my right, and his face was covered with dust. I looked down and there was a foot on the floorboard and I remembered thinking to myself, is that mine or his? And it was mine. This leg cost \$8,000. This leg, which is only good for about three months - I just got it on Friday - cost \$4,000. The average lifetime care of a land mine victim in other countries is around \$3,000 to \$4,000. Nearly \$400,000 has been spent on me so far, to keep me going. For the United States to sit back and say, "Hey, it's a weapon that we need for our security" - I don't believe that. I mean, does anybody out there believe it? Please, tell me.

CALEB ROSSITER: When you provide weapons, you lose control over what will happen to them eventually, and they have a very long shelf life. Certainly, today, throughout Africa, you see misery; misery because the United States has armed non-democratic governments. The largest recipient of U.S. weapons in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980's were Angola, Zaire, Liberia, and Sudan. What do these countries have in common? They literally don't exist today. They've been removed from the economic map of the world because of civil wars. And, oh yes, Somalia - that has been removed from the world map as a functioning country as well.

AUDIO: Our weapons turn these countries into battlegrounds. Then, the economy is destroyed. People won't invest. Human rights violations are such that you wouldn't want to take a business in there and try to make an investment. And we end up providing assistance, whether it's military to help stop the fighting or food assistance to help with relief. People are paying a tremendous price in Africa today because the United States armed dictators in the 1980's.

CHARLES SENNOT: And now you have another market in Latin America they want to open up. Latin America has had a ban on sophisticated weapons being sold there since the Carter years. When you think of Latin America now, you think that many of the dictatorships have been turned around. There are still problems, but there has been great progress towards democracy, towards curtailing human rights abuses. Rather than looking at that situation and saying, this is a great time to restrict even more arms sales, we are in the process of lifting that ban, just creating a new kind of gold rush for arms exporters to go down to Latin America and start selling the sophisticated weaponry that we had restricted there.

LORA LUMPE: The aircraft manufacturers in particular want to sell fighter jets to Chile. At the same time the Argentine president and the foreign minister have begged the United States not to lift what restraints we have on sales to the region because they don't want to be forced to match a Chilean purchase. And if Argentina buys advanced

aircraft in reaction to Chile's purchase of advanced aircraft, then undoubtedly Brazil will respond as well.

NARRATOR: The Gulf War, daily televising all the marvels of America's hi-tech weaponry, served as a tremendous marketing tool for the US arms industry. Now, in air shows all around the globe, subsidized by the US taxpayer, the arms industry hawks its wares to almost anybody who will buy.

CHARLES SENNOT: It's this real hustle. You feel like you're in a used car lot. And you feel like, here is America, not looking at these weapons as something to fit in with a geopolitical strategy or foreign policy, but something to pawn off to the third world for quick profits while they can get it without any consideration of the fact that these poor countries can't really afford these weapons, that these poor countries should be using their limited financial resources on much more important things like health care, housing, education. What are we doing here? Why are we putting all of this money into these weapons so that corporations can make a huge amount of money while they lay off working people. And I think it really caught me how crass this whole thing really is, that it isn't about anything high-minded and lofty, It's not about foreign policy principles. It's not about geopolitical strategy. It's simply about profit. It's simply about greed and the hard sell and a hustle to the developing world.

CALEB ROSSITER: The irony is that these industries are making profits that belong to the US taxpayer. All these weapons were developed for the US armed forces with research and development funds that came out of the taxpayers' pockets, not out of Lockheed Martin or McDonnell Douglas. And so all this profit that they make by selling abroad is pure gravy off the top. They shouldn't be in this business at all; they've already been paid to make the F-15. Right now, the F-15E is the premier fighter plane that we have, but because we've exported that and the F-16 all over the world, thanks to the efforts of the Aerospace Industries Association and its members, now the companies are clamoring to the Congress, we need the F-22, the advanced fighter plane for the Pentagon to purchase, so that we have a superior air fighter to everything else that's out there in the world. It's a heck of a scam. And it is certainly working because the F-22, at \$80 billion is going into the new budget.

JACK SHANAHAN: Once we get F-22's into the inventory and get them into the inventories in the Middle East and in the Far East, we then have to build something better than the F-22 in order to maintain our air dominance, which is now the current policy; it's no longer air superiority, but the name of the game in the Pentagon is called Air Dominance anywhere in the world. And if we continue to sell the best aircraft we have in our inventory, we've got to go out and invent something even better. Because we know that eventually we're going to have to fight them.

LORA LUMPE: The arms industry, of course, never cites profits as the reason why it wants to export weapons abroad; rather, it talks about its labor force, the number of jobs that are going to be lost if an arms sale isn't made abroad. The reality is quite different, in fact, because the arms corporations are increasingly exporting the production line overseas as well as the weapons.

CHARLES SENNOTT: The people who gain are the corporations, and specifically, the top executives in those corporations. In our series, we tracked six companies, six of the leading defense manufacturers in the United States over a period of four years. During that four-year period, these six companies laid off 178,000 workers. During that same time, executive pay for top executives tripled 300 percent.

SEYMOUR MELMAN: We can have as many jobs as we have now, and a lot more, if we set to work on restoring the decaying infrastructure of the United States. And if we set to work on all manner of constructive things, we'll have a labor shortage in nothing flat. But that requires thinking afresh. We have a military industrial complex which occupies the central role in the United States and which pre-empts the wealth to such a degree that you can see, unless you choose to make yourself blind, that the American people are wanting in decent housing; they're wanting a decent railroad system, they're wanting decent schools.

LORA LUMPE: We're shutting down libraries, methadone clinics, homeless shelters and being told we don't have resources for any of those things. It's indefensible that we would be spending 6 or 7 billion dollars a year of public money to promote weapons sales abroad.

CALEB ROSSITER: The US military budget is eating up the US social budget. The military budget, which is the largest single thing taxpayers pay for, is going to gobble up like a Pac Man the social programs. It's already doing that.

JACK SHANAHAN: We continue to spend in this country some \$265 billion a year to maintain a military establishment that doesn't have an enemy out there that's worth talking about.

NARRATOR: The United States is number one in the world in military might. We are also number one, among the 18 industrial nations, in our poverty rate for children. One American child in five lives in poverty. Ten million American children do not have health care. Fifteen children a day die from gunshot wounds. The welfare reform legislation weakens standards to protect battered children.

DR. FORBES: I believe that in America today, although it's not articulated, I think there is a strong sense that people who have, have because they've been diligent, they have been faithful, they have been fruitful in their enterprises, and that the people who

have not, maybe it's really because they didn't try enough, or even maybe there's some flaw in their character, or, you know, tough luck, but maybe they're just not quite able to make it. In America we don't always see the connection that Tillich, one of my professors used to say "Our having is not unrelated to other peoples not having.

BISHOP GUMBLETON: People in this country don't want to hear that my lifestyle is really the cause of other people in other parts of the world starving to death; that I have more than I have a right to. No one has a right to anything beyond their need when others lack the barest necessities. And so when the poor demand some of these things from us, they're demanding what belongs to them. It is so clear that there's something unjust when you consider that we're part of the one fifth of the world's people using 83% of the world's resources. That means that the other four fifths of the world's people have 17% of the world's resources and the bottom fifth have 1.4% So there are people who are just devastated by poverty in huge numbers, hundreds of millions of people

DR. FORBES: When we look at such patterns as third world debt and patterns by which we exploit other economies to take care of our needs, or the kind of military intervention that takes place when some resources that we consider dear to us are in some way threatened, it reveals that we, unwittingly, have established ourselves almost to the point of idolatrous significance.

LORA LUMPE: I certainly don't want to feel blood on my hands because of the support my government is giving to all sorts of repressive governments and warring governments throughout the world.

JACK SHENAHAN: We could stop selling weapons that kill people to people who don't need them, and if we did that, I suggest that others would follow suit. We tried to pass a code of conduct on arms sales in this country. It would forbid the sale of any arms to countries that do not respect the human rights of their citizens and would forbid arms sales to countries that are still being led by dictators. All of these rules would close the loopholes that currently exist in our arms export legislation. But we can't get that through Congress. And the American people can force their congressmen to consider such legislation, and they should. That is the best.

CYNTHIA MCKINNEY: It didn't help that the Clinton administration came out against us. It doesn't help that the arms lobby contributes 14 million dollars to these very same people who had to vote on the code. None of these things help our cause. But the one thing that does help our cause and guarantees eventual success is the rightness of this issue, the rightness of our position, and the common sense that it makes to the average American once they understand what the United States is doing.

NARRATOR: Just as Cynthia McKinney and Dana Rohrbacher are trying to get the United States to obey a Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers, Dr. Oscar Arias, former

President of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Laureate, has gathered other Nobel Laureates of recent years, to present to the United Nations an International Code of Conduct to be followed by all of the arms exporting nations.

DR. ARIAS: When one asserts that a country wants arms, to whom exactly are we referring? Is it the single mother in Indonesia or the orphan who lives on the street in Egypt who are pressuring their leaders to buy tanks and missiles? The poor of the world are crying out for schools and doctors, not guns and generals.

JOSE RAMOS-HORTA: In 1977, I was in this country and began to receive news about the situation in my homeland, East Timor. First came the news that a sister was killed by American aircraft. A month later another brother was killed by American helicopters. A month later a third brother was killed by M-16, an execution. These brothers and sisters of mine join millions of people -- at least 20 million people who since World War II died in conventional conflicts in wars in developing countries as a result of weapons supplied by the five permanent members of the Security Council.

ELIE WIESEL: Great powers must be made to realize that selling weapons indiscriminately may bring them business, contracts, checks, but not honor. Usually, adults fight and children die. Usually, adults hate one another and children pay the price for their hatred.

DALAI LAMA: In the family as well as in the various educational institutions, I think we have to make every effort to carry out internal disarmament. What's the use of anger, what's the use of hatred?. Problems are bound to happen, we must find a way to overcome these problems without using violence. Please try to make a contribution -- from each of us, from such an effort--then there is a real possibility for transformation of humanity.

NARRATOR: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hope of its children. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense." (Dwight Eisenhower)