

CONSCIENCE INDIA REPORT-2000--2002

Conscience India was constituted in the year 1996. It has been a part of Gandhi-in-Action activities since 1986-87. We did not have the Tax system that openly express the Taxes and Defence expenditures. We have been working against the Government policies that promote War mania and pillings up of the arms including nuclear arms. We have to often work to persuade the governments of India and Pakistan to reduce tension on the border and the military actions. After the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998, Conscience India has organized seminars, public meetings and fasts to protest against the cult of growing militarism.

In the year 2000 India and Pakistan got involved in military action on the Siachen Border and Kargil. To diffuse many initiatives were taken to promote peace and harmony at the people to people level. Conscience India wrote to the Prime minister of India and the President of Pakistan to avoid Military actions and solve the problems around the table during the Indo-Pak Summit. A national Seminar was organized on the topic "Indo-Pak Summit: Hopes and Aspirations of Common People". Leading social activists, journalists and Gandhian peace activists participated in this Seminar and it attracted the attention of the media.

In the year 2002 (Feb.) Government of India proposed in its budget a hidden item of war Tax in the name of Defence Surcharge. Conscience India immediately wrote a letter of protest to the Prime Minister, Finance minister and the Defence Minister, copy of the letter is attached.

Indian government has brought a nasty and dictatorial law in the name of internal defence of the country and any one oppose to the government policies is detained under this POTA Act without trial for one year. It has certainly curtailed civil liberties and human rights of expressing free and fair opinion. It is becoming more and more difficult to oppose anti-people acts.

CONSCIENCE INDIA

Gandhi-in-Action

(International Group of Non-violent Activists)

CONSTRUCTIVE WORKERS HOME

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Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji,
Prime Minister of India,
P.M. Office, South Block,
NEW DELHI-110011.

Dated: 6th March 2002.

Hon'ble Prime Minister Sir,

I want to draw your kind attention to the proposed Annual General Budget for the year 2002-2003, placed before the Parliament on the 28th Feb. 2002 by the Hon'ble Finance minister (FM). As per the list of various items for the Revenue collections proposed by the FM, there is a proposal in the name of "Security Surcharge" for raising funds for the Defense Expenditure through a direct tax on the taxpayer. In a way, it is indirectly a proposal for imposing 'War Tax'. There has never been such a Tax Proposal in the past like 'Security Surcharge.'

I belong to an international group of Conscientious Objectors which is oppose to the cult of War Taxes, War mania and Wars. We, on humanitarian grounds, strongly object to this trend of globally escalating expenditures on the Armaments and Armies in the name of the 'defense and security of the country'. As per the available statistics 37% of the total human resources of the world are being spent on wars, war industries and for building armaments and armies. We, of course do attach, due importance to the question of the Security and Defense of the citizens. But what sort of security do the ordinary citizens need? Unless and until the socio-economic security and bare minimum basic needs of life are provided, mere security from outside invasion has not got much meaning. For a hungry person it does not make much difference whether he or she dies of hunger or of a bullet or bomb due to the psychologically created presupposed threats of the 'enemy', from the other side of the Geo-political boundary.

The moral and political responsibility of the 'Welfare States' is supposed to be that of protecting, serving and saving the life of the poor and hungry billions, living on this globe. It is a cruel reality that because of the inadequacy of human resources two third of humanity living on this globe is still deprived of minimum basic requirements for just surviving and making both the ends meet. It is because of the wrong priorities of the Institutions of the States. More and more human resources are deployed in promoting the cult of militarism rather than building World Peace, fraternity and goodwill among the people living on this globe.

Of late, with the emergence of the WTO and the new concept of Economic Globalization, the role of the 'Welfare States' has slowly been fading away. In near future the Institutions of the States will no more remain 'Welfare States' as most of the public utility services are being privatized. Economic Powers are gradually overtaking the Institutions of the Political Power. In these changing situations how morally and politically is it justifiable for the 'Institutions of the States' to un-proportionately go on spending the scarcely available human and material resources in promoting war industries and accumulating war materials with the clear cut intentions to kill human being? The State should rather give top priority on spending for the upliftment of the socio-economic life of millions that are compelled to live in abject poverty and sub-human conditions.

Sir, you will agree with me that 'internal economic and social security' of the poorest of the poor of our country is equally important as that of physical protection from the outside invasion. It is becoming a well-established fact nowadays, that in the name of the 'Defense' and 'Security' of the country, "underhand Deals" have been becoming very common. Through these deals the hard earned money and human resources of the peace loving citizens are being drained out to buy and manufacture weapons. Most of the scams and scandals in the defense deals are done under the nose of the people sitting on the highest public posts and positions in 'Political Power Arena. The Past history shows that Governments have not been able to place

before the Parliament and the people such scandals and scams. These scams surface when the fight for the political supremacy takes place among the power hungry politicians. Such scams are usually suppressed by the argument that "it is not in the public interest and in the larger national interest."

I would, therefore beg to call upon your Government to reconsider imposing this 'hidden war tax' in the name of the security, and instead I would like to propose that the government should create a fund for promoting 'diplomacy of peace building programs'. We all know that our military expenditures have gone almost double in the last four years (from rupees 39,897 crores to 65,000 crores in the years 1998 to 2002). It is a matter of deep concern. I firmly believe that personally your good self is a peace-loving citizen and have often expressed your inner commitment for world peace and harmony through your wonderful poetry and goodwill gestures of friendship with the neighboring countries.

Please do reconsider this proposal of the FM of imposing hidden War Tax in the proposed General Budget for 2002-2003. This proposal could be made in the form and shape of a Peace Tax that could be used in building a culture of "peaceful and non-violent defense education" to our countrymen.

"War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaign (WTR&PTC) is a worldwide movement of the ordinary peace loving citizens, for building a peaceful and non-violent world order. The members of the WTR&PTC have been organizing non-violent resistance against those governments that impose war taxes. This movement has been going on in many parts of the world for the last 18 years involving thousands of peace loving citizens of the world.

Hoping to hear from you. With warm regards,

Sincerely Yours,

(Dr. Arya Bhushan Bhardwaj)
National Coordinator

Copy to: Hon'ble Defense Minister and Finance Minister, Govt. Of India, South Block, New Delhi-110011