

Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group

Non-military firearms policy

November 2013

The EIAG recommends that the national investing bodies (NIBs) should exclude from their investments:

- Any company deriving more than 10% of its turnover from the production or sale of non-military firearms or ammunition, excepting companies specialising exclusively in products specifically designed for hunting or sporting purposes.

POLICY REASONING

1. The EIAG has examined the appropriateness of investment in the production and sale of non-military firearms and ammunition against the policy framework of the defence investments policy.
2. The EIAG has concluded that it is inappropriate for the NIBs to invest in any company deriving more than 10% of its turnover from the production or sale of non-military firearms or ammunition, excepting companies specialising exclusively in products specifically designed for hunting or sporting purposes.
3. The reasoning for the EIAG's concern is as follows:
 - Christians are commanded not to kill, murder or hate (Exodus 20.13; Matthew 5.21-26 & 38-48). The primary purpose of non-military firearms, other than those designed specifically for hunting or sport, is to inflict death or injury to persons.
 - The exception to the injunction not to murder that is widely acknowledged by Christians is warfare within the bounds of the just war doctrine. However, this doctrine applies to conflict between states, not conflict between persons. Civilians are not a 'proper authority' under just war doctrine. The Church of England's 39 Articles of Religion (Article 37) make provision for the bearing of weapons only 'at the commandment of the magistrate', i.e. for the purposes of the state, such as armed police or the military.
 - Even if just war doctrine were relevant, one of its criteria is 'overall proportionality'. All the evidence (e.g. from Australia which has implemented strict gun control, compared to the US which has not) suggests that the more non-military firearms there are in circulation, the greater the incidence of civilian deaths and injuries. The total good to be expected from non-military ownership of firearms does not outweigh the total evil to be expected.

4. The EIAG acknowledges that there are Christians holding different views, especially in the US, who argue that the ownership and use of firearms for self-defence is legitimate.
5. The EIAG also acknowledges that non-military personnel entrusted by the state with the protection of the public and maintenance of public order (e.g. police officers) may need to carry firearms (as implied in Article 37 of the 39 Articles); and that there are circumstances in which private security personnel may need to carry firearms (for example in areas of armed conflict or areas where law and order has broken down).
6. The EIAG faced the same considerations in determining its recommendations on defence investments. The EIAG noted that attitudes to war and armaments are not defining matters for Christians or for Anglican orthodoxy. It observed that under just war theology there might be legitimate instances in which armaments could be used. However, it took the view that, because armaments are purposely designed to destroy human life, it would be inappropriate for the Church to devote capital to, and derive profit from, companies that support an activity (warfare) that, even if conducted ethically, falls so far short of the Christian ideal.
7. The same applies in the case of non-military firearms. While there may be legitimate instances in which non-military firearms may be deployed, companies who derive the great majority of their turnover from their production or sale are not an appropriate investment for the Church, because their products are purposely designed to destroy human life.
8. The EIAG has recommended that the exclusion should apply to companies deriving more than 10% of their turnover from the production or sale of non-military firearms or ammunition because this is the threshold in the defence policy at which companies are excluded for involvement in conventional weapons.
9. It is possible, in theory, that there will be manufacturers and retailers involved in both hunting/sporting firearms and other non-military firearms who will be caught by this policy even if their revenues from non-hunting/sporting firearms are less than 10% of their turnover. We have taken the advice of our ethical screening service provider on what constitutes an implementable screen. They advised that while they could identify companies specialising exclusively in products specifically designed for hunting or sporting purposes, they would not be able to break down revenues from hunting/sporting firearms and other non-military firearms for companies involved in both types of firearms.
10. Conversely, there will be general retailers who derive less than 10% of their revenues from the sale of non-military firearms and ammunition who will not be captured by this exclusion. The EIAG's view is that in these cases revenues from firearms and ammunition do not constitute a sufficiently high share of the business' activities to merit a company's exclusion from investment.

11. It is also the case that the products of companies producing or selling hunting and sporting firearms may be abused and used for violence against persons. Our ethical investment policies, however, are generally determined by the primary purpose of products. To give an example that brings this to life, kitchen knives may also be abused and used for violence against persons, but this does not make investment by the Church in companies producing or selling kitchen knives inappropriate.

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