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Leading national and local peace and justice organizations in Germany have launched a major campaign to oppose the German government's recently revealed plan to acquire combat drones (weaponized drones).

The organizations met together in Hannover earlier this month to begin the joint campaign. As a first step, they drafted an appeal— ["No Combat Drones"](#) —which was made public this past Sunday. Close to one hundred German organizations and hundreds of individuals have already endorsed the Appeal, signaling a very strong interest in this issue.

The Appeal will be circulated throughout Germany during the annual Easter weekend peace marches. The German activists plan to continue the campaign until the German government and military agree to abandon the plan to make use of combat drones.

Among the NATO member countries, so far only the U.K. and Italy have weaponized drones, in both cases acquired from the U.S. The drones in use by the German military up to now have been unarmed, for example, the Heron I that Germany leases from Israel for reconnaissance in Afghanistan. The German military has turned to the U.S. forces to request occasional drone strikes in Afghanistan. Some time ago the German government announced plans to work together with France to produce a European combat drone that is to be ready by 2020 -- but that seemed a long while off.

But in August 2012, Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière, a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), told several leading German newspapers that he would like to obtain an Israeli or U.S. combat drone for the German military (Bundeswehr) almost immediately. "The new weapons have a huge advantage: They are more targeted," he told the German daily Die Welt. "And the better one can target, the less damage there will be."

The announcement by de Mazière that the Bundeswehr wanted to obtain combat drones was met by hefty criticism in leading German media. For example, in October the prestigious German daily Süddeutsche published an article with the title "Drones are Terror" by a renowned German specialist in international criminal law, Professor Kai Ambos.

Then in January, in answer to an official inquiry by the Left Party of the German Parliament, Merkel's government admitted that the planning for combat drones had advanced well beyond just being a wish of the Defense Minister. Indeed, her government had already made the

decision to acquire them in the near future.

Many parliamentarians were outraged. Both the Left Party and the Green Party submitted formal motions against the German government's plan to obtain combat drones. The motions have not yet been scheduled for parliamentary debate.

Even members of the SPD and the FDP expressed strong reservations. For example, the senior SPD parliamentarian Thomas Oppermann told Spiegel Online: "I'm opposed to a hasty decision because this brings a new quality to warfare. We need a broad societal and parliamentary debate about the ethical and legal boundaries of the deployment of combat drones and not some backroom decision. It is entirely inappropriate that the public and parliament have learned of these plans more or less by accident."

The German media has been following the recent debates in the U.S. on targeted killings and has even reported on some of the U.S. anti-drone actions, such as the visit of 32 U.S. and U.K. activists to Pakistan last October and the disturbance of the confirmation hearing of John Brennan as CIA director.

Defense Minister Mazière has tried to reassure the opposition and the public by saying that -- unlike in the U.S. -- the German constitution would not allow the German military to use drone strikes against people in countries against which war has not been declared.

But most Germans are not convinced. According to a survey of 20 countries conducted by Pew Research Center in February 2013, 59% in Germany disapprove of drone strikes (whereas in the U.S. 62% approve of them). And a recent by ARD television in Germany shows even higher numbers of Germans opposed.

To Germans it is clear that the combat drones would in any case be used by the Bundeswehr in foreign countries, and since the end of World War II, a majority of Germans have opposed German military intervention in other countries. Nor do most Germans find credible the claim that using weaponized drones is a more "humanitarian" form of warfare. (After all, even Hitler said "I ordered the German Air Force to conduct humanitarian warfare" in his speech in Gdansk/Danzig just after the brutal Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 that launched World War II, a war in which more than 60 million people were killed.)

With a broad social movement gathering, with the churches also against combat drones, and with political opposition in the German Parliament growing, Merkel's government last week seemed to back off of the plan to purchase combat zones this year. The German newspaper *Handelsblatt*

reported that the German decision on whether to acquire combat drones will be postponed until 2014 -- i.e. until after the parliamentary elections in September 2013. "This issue could trip us up in the election," said one CDU Member of Parliament, because the discussions about the human rights issues surrounding combat drones are "much too emotional at the moment."

The German government may have postponed, but clearly has not abandoned, its plans to soon acquire and later produce combat drones. Could a loud NEIN! ("No!") from the German people

slow the pace of international proliferation of combat drones and help lead to a much-needed international treaty?