

THE NUCLEAR BAN TREATY

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NOW IS THE TIME TO BAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS – FOREVER

For as long as nuclear weapons remain in existence there is a danger they might be used, either by accident, by miscalculation or as a deliberate action. Even a limited nuclear exchange would cause death, destruction and contamination on a massive scale, leading to humanitarian disasters and refugee crises.

But there is hope. In 1972 the world banned biological weapons. Since then international treaties have prohibited chemical weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. It would make sense that nuclear weapons with their even greater destructive capacity are subjected to the same legal prohibition and to a compulsory regime of verification and control.

In 2017 the vast majority of the world's nations have made known their abhorrence of nuclear weapons by working together to agree a Nuclear Ban Treaty. A large number of states are expected to sign the treaty, and once it has been ratified by 50 nations it will enter into force.

States that are known to have active nuclear weapons programmes are the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.

Recent studies have shown that in the event of a detonation of a 5-kiloton nuclear weapon over a city everyone in a radius of 7.5 km would be killed or seriously injured. Hospitals would have disappeared or be damaged. The vast majority of injured people would die alone without so much as a human hand or voice to comfort them, and without any relief for their agonising pain.

Additional initiatives will be necessary to finally rid the world of nuclear weapons, but the Nuclear Ban Treaty will make the possession of these weapons morally and practically more difficult.

Successive UK Governments have opposed United Nations' initiatives to work out the path towards a world free of nuclear weapons. In opposing the Nuclear Ban Treaty the UK Government is likely to find itself on the wrong side of history. A change of direction is needed - find out how you can be involved.

The problem – still a danger

Currently, there are more than 15,000 nuclear weapons stockpiled worldwide, with several thousand deployed and ready to use. Deployed warheads are being reduced in number by the NEW START treaty agreed between the United States and Russia, but even after these reductions there will still be around 4,000 active nuclear weapons worldwide. Russia and the United States have nuclear weapons on notice to fire within minutes. Meanwhile all nine states that have nuclear weapons programmes are upgrading or renewing their systems.

The detonation of a nuclear weapon would be catastrophic. It is likely to have regional and even global consequences, causing destruction, contamination, death and displacement. Over the longer term there would be profound damage to the environment, agriculture, socioeconomic development and human health and well-being. The United Nations and Red Cross confirmed that no state or international body could adequately address the immediate humanitarian emergency or long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation in a populated area, nor provide adequate assistance to those affected.

Why the Nuclear Ban Treaty is needed – stigmatising nuclear weapons to halt proliferation and encourage disarmament

Worryingly some governments, including our own, tend to talk up the role of nuclear weapons giving an impression that they are a panacea to a range of unspecified threats, or describing them as an insurance policy against an uncertain future.¹ Some governments threaten a first strike but refuse to attempt any explanation or justification for such a threat. This risks

“Attempts to sustain peace through the threat of indiscriminate mass destruction could not be further from the peace to which Christ calls us. It is vital that the UK demonstrates the sort of change it wants to see in the world.”

The Right Reverend Dr Russell Barr, former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

“Security policies based on the threat of the use of nuclear weapons are immoral and ultimately self-defeating.”

26 prominent UK faith leaders, The Times, 2015

increasing the motivation for other states to acquire nuclear weapons. Against this backdrop a nuclear ban treaty will reinforce a vital principle that still has widespread international support but which is in danger of being eroded; namely that civilians should be protected in conflict and not be subject to the effects of indiscriminate weapons. This principle forms the basis for treaties banning biological weapons (1968), landmines (1991), chemical weapons (1998) and cluster munitions (2006).

The Nuclear Ban Treaty underscores previous treaty obligations entered into by nuclear weapons states to “pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control”.² Despite these obligations, in recent years nuclear weapons states have repeatedly opposed multilateral disarmament initiatives. For example in 2010, the UK blocked the UN Secretary General’s proposal to merely discuss at a high-level conference a five-point plan for progressive nuclear disarmament.³

The UK government has repeatedly stated its desire to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The ban treaty process therefore deserves UK support as it reaffirms the NPT as the ‘cornerstone’ of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. It increases the taboo around proliferation, tarnishes the ‘status value’ of nuclear weapons technology and increases the cost to any states that might in the future leave the NPT to develop weapons programmes.



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“I just find myself baffled by any attempt to give a Christian account of why we need a more expensive way of unaccountable slaughter.”

The Most Reverend Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury

What a nuclear ban treaty will achieve – creating obstacles to the further development and operation of nuclear weapons systems worldwide⁴

International treaties have huge moral, as well as legal significance, even for the countries which do not sign them. It is important that governments like our own that insist on retaining nuclear weapons understand the moral outrage that these weapons elicit from the rest of the world, as well as from their own citizens.

A treaty to ban all nuclear weapons will not, in itself, get rid of them. However, it is worth remembering that when the treaty to ban landmines was first being proposed, the UK government opposed that as well. Eventually it became a major advocate of the treaty. In 2018 the United Nations will arrange a summit to discuss with governments further conventions and treaties that could define the path towards the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide.

In a recently leaked memo from the US mission to NATO it was stated that the Nuclear Ban Treaty would have a direct impact on NATO and its allies. It stated that the difficulties would include the transit of nuclear-related material through



Setsuko Thurlow, Hiroshima Survivor, speaks at the UN first negotiating conference in March

“I am convinced that the desire for peace and fraternity planted deep in the human heart will bear fruit in concrete ways to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all, to the benefit of our common home.”

His Holiness Pope Francis

territorial airspace or seas of signatory countries, the impossibility of US ships conducting port calls in various places and the undermining of the ‘deterrence’ concept in the minds of adversaries and the general public.⁵

There are also financial and technical costs for countries which insist on retaining nuclear weapons once they have been banned by international treaty. Banks will have difficulty in financing nuclear weapons programmes and companies that build and maintain nuclear weapons may be prohibited from doing so.

The call for a nuclear ban treaty – a global movement

Inspired by the success of the international campaign to ban landmines, a global civil society coalition was formed in 2007.⁶ The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has gathered several hundred non-governmental organisations representing millions of people who are calling for a Nuclear Ban Treaty. The Nuclear Ban Treaty also has the support of the majority of the world’s governments as well as many city mayors, parliamentarians and trade unions across the globe. It is supported by Pope Francis,⁷ the World Council of Churches⁸ and many other religious institutions worldwide.

“We believe that this is a critical moral issue of our time and that together we can rise to this challenge. We cannot leave this threat to hang over our children and over future generations to come. It is for us to take responsibility ... and achieve the intention of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in all its aspects.”

Leaders of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Quakers

What do our Churches say?

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have called for a new treaty to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide.

All four denominations have stated their opposition to the building of new Trident submarines costing £41 billion and have urged the UK Government to instead negotiate a robust plan for comprehensive nuclear disarmament.⁹

The leaders of those denominations signed a statement with 26 leaders of churches and faith groups agreeing that “any use of nuclear weapons would have devastating humanitarian consequences, ... and violate the principle of dignity for every human being that is common to each of our faith traditions.”¹⁰

Take Action

Ask your MP to:



welcome the introduction of the Nuclear Ban Treaty and support the UK's signing of it at some point in the future



ask the UK Government to publish a contingency plan for scrapping the construction of new Trident submarines (not due to come into service until the 2030s) so that we can enter into honest and meaningful negotiation on multilateral disarmament



urge the UK Government to state categorically that the UK will never be the country to use nuclear weapons first.

For further actions and updates see www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking.

Endnotes

1. *White Paper: The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent*, 2007: <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmdfence/225/225i.pdf>
2. *International Court of Justice advisory opinions: Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 1996: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/95/7495.pdf>
3. <http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2010/>
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5. http://www.icanw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NATO_OCT2016.pdf
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9. <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking/trident/>
10. <http://www.endnuclearweapons.org.uk>

