

Science for Peace Position on Nuclear Weapons

Science for Peace calls on the Canadian government to reverse its position on the immoral policy of nuclear deterrence and immediately sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We also reiterate our call that Canada withdraw from NATO and stand in opposition to the global trend toward militarization.

Background

“The destructive power of nuclear weapons cannot be contained in either time or space. They have the potential to destroy all civilization and the entire ecosystem of the planet.”

The International Court of Justice 1996

Our world faces two unique existential threats: one is from catastrophic climate change; the other from the use of nuclear weapons. While we are seeing some recognition of the danger posed by climate change, little attention is being paid to that of nuclear war. But, the danger posed by nuclear weapons is as great as it has ever been; and it is growing.

For the first time in over thirty years no nuclear disarmament negotiations are underway or planned. The US has abandoned the Iran deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The hard-won INF Treaty, the ABM Treaty, and even New START are in jeopardy. Despite the rhetoric, talks with North Korea have yet to yield concrete results. The outlook for the 2020 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is tenuous.

A multi-trillion dollar nuclear arms race is underway. A new generation of warheads for US Trident submarines is now in full production. They are designed not for deterrence, but for the battlefield. Russia is following suit. Rather than disarming, all nuclear-armed states are investing massively, not simply in retaining nuclear weapons, but modernizing them to make them more useable. The missile systems for these weapons are becoming more dangerous with the development of hypersonic projectiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads at more than fifteen times the speed of sound: catastrophic destruction at unimaginable speed.

We have seen the escalation of explicit threats to use nuclear weapons between the US/NATO and Russia, between India and Pakistan, between North Korea and the US, and from Israeli leaders. Most of the nine states that possess nuclear weapons have to some degree outlined the circumstances in which they would be prepared to use them. Consequently, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has set its Doomsday Clock to Two Minutes to Midnight, the closest it has been to a nuclear apocalypse since 1953 when the US tested the hydrogen bomb.

We are told that nuclear weapons are necessary for our security and we hear about “tactical” nuclear weapons and “strategic” nuclear weapons. But there is no such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon. Nuclear weapons are not defensive weapons, nor are they tactical or

strategic. They are heinous instruments of ultimate terror and death, designed to inflict mass casualties on civilians and there are currently hundreds of nuclear weapons aimed at all the major cities of the world. Even a limited nuclear exchange would cause appalling devastation to which there could be no humanitarian response.

Our only protection from this scenario is to see that these weapons are eliminated and never used. In 2017, non-nuclear weapons states gathered at the United Nations to negotiate and adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Once ratified by 50 states it will become international law. Declaring nuclear weapons illegal is an important first step toward their elimination. This is the same approach that has been used to work towards the elimination of biological weapons, chemical weapons, land mines and cluster munitions.

The elimination of all nuclear weapons, and an end to the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence, is an objective that Canada has long shared with the international community. However, in an astounding reversal of this historical position, Canada boycotted the negotiations of the treaty and is refusing to sign or ratify it. This is clearly a violation of our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race.” It also ignores the 2010 unanimous Parliamentary resolution of both the House of Commons and the Senate to “deploy a major world-wide Canadian diplomatic initiative in support of preventing nuclear proliferation and increasing the rate of nuclear disarmament” and turns a deaf ear to the call of over 1000 Order of Canada recipients to achieve a verifiable treaty on the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

The command for the irrational position of boycott came directly in a document from the United States to its NATO allies in which it was stated “...we strongly encourage you to vote ‘NO’ on any vote at the UN First Committee on starting negotiations for a nuclear ban treaty.” It went on to say, “... we feel efforts to negotiate an immediate ban on nuclear weapons or to delegitimize nuclear deterrence are fundamentally at odds with NATO’s basic policies and our shared security interests.” That Canada meekly complied with this request is an indication of how far our government is from representing our traditional values. The doctrine that having the capacity to destroy entire cities and annihilate millions of people is the basis of our security is depraved and one that most Canadians would reject.

Therefore, Science for Peace calls on the Canadian government to reverse its position on this immoral policy and immediately sign and ratify the TPNW. We also reiterate our call that Canada withdraw from NATO and stand in opposition to the global trend toward militarization. The future of civilization is at stake.