

Dave Webb

Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

U.K.

Hello - I am Dave Webb, Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK. Thank you for inviting me to speak at the Gensuikyo 2021 Conference on A & H bombs.

Friends, your Conference comes at a particularly important time for the world. We are still facing immediate threats to our very existence from climate change and nuclear war and the governments of the world are taking very little action to prevent either of them.

We do not know yet when we will fully emerge from the Covid situation and despite the warnings of scientists over many years about the possibility of a global pandemic, governments were tragically unprepared to deal with it.

And those countries who have been able to produce and distribute vaccines and medical care have done little to help those who cannot.

We are also experiencing the serious effects of climate change. The Earth is warming, rainfall patterns are changing, and sea levels are rising. The risks of heatwaves, floods, droughts and fires have increased considerably but governments have not responded quickly enough to repeated warnings and urgent requests for action.

Around 4 million people world-wide have died from the Covid pandemic. Many of these lives could have been saved if governments had acted when warned.

So it is with nuclear weapons. Since those dreadful days 76 years ago, the hibakusha have been sharing their experiences of the horrifying humanitarian effects of the bombs, and peace movements around the world have echoed their message that “human beings and nuclear weapons cannot co-exist”.

For over 40 years scientists have warned that even a so-called ‘limited nuclear exchange’ would result in sudden global freezing, weather disruption and a devastating global famine, killing billions of people.

But nuclear weapons states are not taking steps to prevent a nuclear holocaust.

Instead, they are upgrading their nuclear arsenals. ICAN has estimated that last year the world spent a total of \$72.6 billion on nuclear weapons – money that is desperately needed to feed the hungry, help the needy, house the homeless and try to prevent climate catastrophe.

Governments have been convinced by warmongers and weapons manufacturers to be suspicious of others, to build barriers and increase spending on the military and on weapons of mass destruction.

And it has been shown that military production and military exercises are huge contributors to greenhouse-gas emissions and increases in military spending result in increased international tensions and make nuclear threats and confrontations more likely.

However, although governments are not taking action, people are. Young people especially can see what is happening to their planet and are responding. Climate change, peace and humanitarian campaigns are realising that their causes are connected.

We can no longer live with the threat of climate or nuclear annihilation.

We must cooperate with the common aim of survival and the creation of a world that puts people and planet first.

ICAN has shown that, working together, we were able to establish a U.N. Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. So far, the nuclear weapons states have rejected that Treaty – but we will work together on that too.

A poll commissioned by CND in January showed that 59% of people in the UK support the government signing the Treaty and we are campaigning in the streets and within parliament to increase that support.

Unfortunately, in March the government announced that the cap on the number of UK nuclear warheads would be increased from 180 to 260 – an increase of 44%.

This unexpected increase ends three decades of gradual reductions in UK nuclear weapons and constitutes a threat to the entire global community, risking a new nuclear arms race and the possibility of a nuclear war.

States and politicians across the world have expressed their opposition to this move – and we thank Gensuikyo for being among the many in the peace movement who sent protest messages to the British government.

The government has also reversed a previous policy of transparency about the operational warhead stockpile and the numbers of warheads per missile and per submarine. Now the only information we have is the stockpile cap.

The long-standing policy that the UK would not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear member of the NPT could also change in the event of a threat from “weapons of mass destruction ... or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact.”

In response, CND commissioned a Legal Opinion authored by legal experts Professor Christine Chinkin and Dr Louise Arimatsu. Their findings show a clear breach of Article VI of the NPT which Britain ratified in 1970.

They also state that the UK would be in breach of international law were it to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons in self-defence solely on the grounds that the future threat of weapons of mass destruction or emerging technologies, could have a comparable impact to nuclear weapons.

The whole Trident replacement programme is also a material breach of the NPT requirement that states should pursue effective negotiations in good faith to end the nuclear arms race.

We also recognise that the threat or use of nuclear weapons, which cause indiscriminate death and destruction, violates fundamental rules of international humanitarian law, the law of armed conflict and the UN Charter.

We are therefore reporting the UK government to the UN for breaching its Treaty commitments.

The UK also cut its international aid budget by £5 billion per year - about the same amount it spends on nuclear weapons – and last November Boris Johnson announced an additional £16.5 billion in military spending over the next four years. A 10% annual increase - the largest in 30 years.

All this is increasing global tensions merely to reinforce his vision of a 'global Britain' remaining a significant force in the world.

Today In the towns and cities of Britain, CND groups are gathering to remember the destruction and suffering of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and pledging to work for nuclear disarmament.

On behalf of them all, I wish you every success for your conference – and for your future campaigns. We will continue to work with you, as we have for so many years now, and continue the struggle to remove the threat of nuclear weapons and ensure that there are no more Hiroshimas and no more Nagasakis.

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