

Dave Webb

Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

U.K.

Hello - friends, colleagues and comrades, my name is Dave Webb, and I am chair of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Thank you for inviting CND to be a part of this important and memorable event and I bring greetings and solidarity from our thousands of members and friends in the U.K.

As you know, the first of March is a significant day in the history of the development of nuclear weapons. When the United States first tested a hydrogen bomb on this day in 1954 it marked a further step in technology that significantly increased the threat of nuclear annihilation. Small enough to be dropped from an aircraft, the bomb resulted in an explosion equivalent to 15 megatons of T.N.T. - much greater than had been predicted. It spread radioactive material over 7,000 square miles, contaminating the people of nearby atolls, US servicemen and the crew of a number of small fishing boats, including those aboard the 'Lucky Dragon'.

This test introduced the world to the effects of fallout, resulting in terrible sickness and death to all who were exposed to it, including the residents of the Rongelap atoll which soon became covered by a fine white powder. Nobody knew it was radioactive fallout, children played with it, played in it, they even tasted it. Most of those children, and many of the adults, developed cancers and many died but the U.S. refused to disclose what the fallout consisted of, stating reasons of "national security". They dismissed the severity of the fallout and denied any responsibility.

As you know, this is only a small part of the story of the nuclear Pacific which, between 1946 and 1958, experienced the equivalent to the dropping of 1 Hiroshima sized bomb every day for 19 years. A number of the islands were left uninhabitable for generations and cancer rates are still high. In 1946 the people of Bikini were asked to temporarily leave their atoll because it was needed for a project that would be for "the good of mankind and to end all world wars." The Islanders agreed but were never able to return permanently.

As with all things nuclear, this is a story of lies and coverups, with little or no thought or compensation for the victims. The stories of these people and the many others who were victims of nuclear testing, added to those of the *hibakusha*, played a vitally important role in bringing the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons into existence.

In January, we joined with you and many others around the world to celebrate that very Treaty coming into force. It was a joyful occasion for so many of us who have campaigned for such a long time to ban nuclear weapons from the Earth. It was the culmination of a well organised and effective international campaign that focussed on the humanitarian effects of these horrific weapons.

Today, we join with you once more in urging all states that have not yet signed the Treaty to do so without delay – there is no time to lose.

We have worked together for many years to see a time when nuclear weapons would be made illegal under international law. Now this has happened at last, but a great deal of work still lies ahead of us before any of the nuclear states will come round to signing up to it. The Treaty came about through the deeply impassioned and committed international cooperation coordinated by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons who brought all of us together and we must continue that collaboration to ensure that more states sign and increase the pressure on the nuclear states.

The momentum for change is strong and growing stronger and young people in particular, are very aware of the possible catastrophic effects of climate change and nuclear weapons. A few weeks ago, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists held their Doomsday Clock at just 100 seconds to midnight for another year, saying that there are enough “glimmers of hope” to prevent the hands from being moved further forward. Among them is the removal of Donald Trump from the U.S. Presidency and the renewal of the New START treaty between the US and Russia.

So, how do we best build on this position? The recent lock downs and isolations imposed because of the Covid pandemic have meant that many of us have been confined to our homes unable to work and meet with others. This barrier to our normal behaviour has forced us to think of new ways of meeting and talking together.

Online meetings (like this one) have become the norm and while they do not offer the advantages of human contact, they have increased our outreach and enabled wider participation in international meetings.

Covid has also made it clear that, despite numerous past warnings, governments were not prepared for a pandemic. As the overseers of the Doomsday Clock have said “while deadly, the virus is not an existential threat. Its consequences will be grave but will not obliterate civilization”. Nuclear weapons could, and the easiest and cheapest way to remove that possibility must be to remove the weapons – not build more.

We will be continuing to build support in Parliament for cancelling the UK’s replacement for the Trident submarine-based system. Our current government continues to say that the Treaty undermines the NPT and they will never sign it. Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn, a vice-president of CND, has lost the leadership of the Labour opposition and their policy of continuing to support nuclear weapons will be more difficult to change. However, there are still several Labour MPs and the majority of Party members who support us, and many local parties have already passed motions of support for the Treaty. We will be working with them, trade unions and others, on a defence diversification programme to ensure that the livelihoods of those working in the defence industries are not threatened by disarmament.

Many local groups have been enthusiastically working to encourage their MPs, local politicians, and faith leaders to pledge support for the Treaty as part of our ‘Ban Communities’ campaign. A number of cities and towns in the UK, such as Manchester, Oxford, Edinburgh, Brighton, and Leeds, have now passed resolutions of support and 56 MPs and 86 members of Scottish and Welsh Parliaments have signed pledges of support. Many groups and communities are joining the challenge to increase these numbers much further.

We will continue to help mobilise the grass-roots movement, further broaden the context of our work and strengthen our links with environmental and equal rights groups. We will be encouraging local groups to lobby their pension schemes, local authorities, etc. to disinvest from companies involved in nuclear weapons.

There is a lot of support for our position and a recent poll conducted on behalf of CND by Survation showed that 77% of the British public support a total global ban on nuclear weapons and 59% want the British government to sign the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty.

Recently released polls have also revealed very high levels of support (over 75%) for the TPNW in six NATO nations - Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, two of which host US nuclear weapons for NATO. We are therefore working as part of the campaign to create a European Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. and ensure that all nuclear weapons held there are removed. We will also, of course, continue to work as part of ICAN to help ensure that the international momentum continues to build.

As usual we will also be commemorating the anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and groups around the country will be using these sobering occasions to focus on the humanitarian aspects of the campaign.

The next few years will certainly be challenging and there is a lot of work to do but with so much at stake we **must** continue with our work.

In conclusion, we send best wishes for the success of your conference and for your future work which is always so inspiring. I look forward to continuing to work with you all for a nuclear free future.