

## **Hiroshima 2025: International Meeting Session II**

### **Achieving a peaceful and just world without nuclear weapons**

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#### **Introduction**

Greetings from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to this International Meeting of the World Conference against A and H Bombs. We stand together in our common struggle to eliminate all nuclear weapons. And we send our deepest respect and gratitude to the Hibakusha who work tirelessly to keep alive the memory of the horrific events of 6 August 1945. We also recognise and pay tribute to the role of the Global South in seeking a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, and its leadership role in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive and toxic weapons ever created, threatening all forms of life. They are illegal and immoral. Yet the world's nine declared nuclear armed states have *already* amassed the equivalent firepower of 145,000 Hiroshima bombs – enough to destroy the whole world many times over.

These are increasingly dangerous times, and the threat of nuclear war has resurged with a vengeance. That's led the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute to claim the age of disarmament is over. "We see a clear trend of growing nuclear arsenals, sharpened nuclear rhetoric, and the abandonment of arms control agreements", they write.

As we mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we cannot allow that to be the case. Now, more than ever, we must amplify the voices of the Hibakusha, strengthen the global movement for peace, increase the pressure on nuclear weapons states to halt these nuclear dangers that threaten people and planet, and urgently re-establish commitments by the global community to international disarmament frameworks.

That starts with 3 tasks:

1. First, we need to demystify and debunk the false language of ‘deterrence’. By showing it to be the flawed concept that it is, we can help people to break out of denial
2. Second, building on the groundbreaking Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, we urgently need to take further steps to delegitimise the possession of nuclear weapons
3. And third, we need to strengthen our citizens movements – making stronger connections with the climate and social justice movements in particular

I’ll say a few words about each of these, but first, some context: why does the Stockholm Peace Research Institute sound the alarm? What are the particular dangers of today?

## Context

The US withdrawal from the **Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty** (INF) in 2019, followed by Russia, marked a deeply serious collapse in the world disarmament framework. Moreover some of the key *existing* international arms control treaties are also under threat or soon to expire.

Now, the only major nuclear arms control treaty left between the world’s largest nuclear weapons states, the US and Russia, is the **New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty** (START) which is due to expire in February 2026, leaving them without limits on their arsenals for the time in half a century. Both are already pursuing extensive modernisation programmes. While the US President proposed talks to reduce nuclear weapons with Russia and China back in February, and while it was welcomed by China, since then, there has been no public report of progress. Instead, the reality is that the White House has been seeking to raise the National Nuclear Security Administration’s annual weapons budget by 29%, to \$25bn. That’s the largest increase in spending on non-nuclear warhead development, testing and production since 1962, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Nuclear weapons states signed up to the **nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, up for review next year, continue to fail their commitments to take steps to disarm their nuclear weapons, driving further threats of proliferation. Far from abiding by their legal duties to take steps to

disarm their nuclear weapons, these states are actually increasing and modernising their arsenals.

Shamefully, this includes my own country, the UK. Just last month, the British government announced it would spend £15 bn on the development of new nuclear warheads. Not only that, but Britain has also announced plans to purchase 12 F35A nuclear-capable fighter jets from the US which would enable it to launch nuclear weapons from the air as well as from the sea. This decision has been made without any parliamentary debate, and again likely breaches the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The British Government also plans to build up to 12 nuclear-powered submarines, as part of the AUKUS Treaty with the US and Australia, further increasing tensions in an already volatile situation in the Asia-Pacific.

Weapons are becoming not only deadlier, but riskier, with the integration of nuclear and conventional capabilities increasing the prospect of miscalculation. And we are sadly not short of potential flashpoints: Russia has repeatedly threatened the use of nuclear war in Ukraine, while India's unprecedented use of Brahmos cruise missiles in its recent clash with Pakistan marks a new and dangerous phase in South Asia's strategic balance.

All of this vast spending on nuclear weapons is justified to hard-pressed populations by the claim of deterrence. For example, in the UK, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced last month that the £15bn for what he said was "*our sovereign warhead programme*" (neatly overlooking fact that it cannot be used without US support) was "to secure our deterrent for decades to come ...part of the historic renewal of our nuclear deterrent as the ultimate guarantor of our safety and security – an investment in British pride and the British people."

## **1. Flawed Nuclear Deterrence Theory**

If national pride really depends on our ability to destroy the world many times over, then we are more morally bankrupt than perhaps we thought.

But let's examine the myth of deterrence. In reality, it's a euphemism from the early days of the Cold War, deliberately designed to cut off debate by making nuclear weapons sound as if they were safe, sensible, useful and necessary. So it was made much harder to ask the fundamental questions, like: "does the deterrent really deter?"

Repeatedly calling the UK's Trident nuclear submarines "the deterrent" is just plain silly. This language doesn't confer the capability to deter any more than calling a cat "dog" would give a cat the ability to bark.

Deterrence theory is entirely unproven – and nor can it be proven. In logic, one cannot prove a negative: that is, that doing something causes something else **not** to happen. That a nuclear attack has not happened may be a result of any number of other factors, or simply of exceptional good fortune. To attribute the absence of nuclear war to nuclear deterrence is to register a false positive, which imbues nuclear deterrence with a false sense of efficacy.

Many military experts themselves argue that in fact nuclear weapons make us far less safe, primarily because their very existence increases the likelihood they'll be used, and contributes to the volume of nuclear material circulating around the world.

Nuclear weapons also drive proliferation. If we claim nuclear weapons are essential to our security, how can we possibly deny other countries the right to seek to acquire them? And if they did, would that really be a safer world? I don't think so.

If we are going to debate deterrence, then let's do so honestly, recognising that it is a complex relationship that requires us to understand the fears, threat perceptions, needs and values of others, and to communicate carefully and effectively.

I would argue that the best deterrence of all is to work with other nations to solve global threats like fossil-fuel-induced climate disruption, transnational trafficking in weapons, people and drugs, and the poverty and desperation that fuel conflicts, hunger and violence around the world.

## **2. Second, delegitimising nuclear weapons, in the same way as happened with chemical and biological weapons**

The **Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons** (TPNW) has made some excellent progress on this, but there's more to be done. A campaign could be launched, for example, to ensure everyone in the nuclear chain of command, from a national leader down to the launch officers, is treated as a potential war criminal. As such, they should increasingly be subject to legal measures and sanctions that are enforceable in non-nuclear states. By enshrining the nuclear taboo in law, we could accelerate the moral and political delegitimization of nuclear weapons in the same way as happened with chemical and biological weapons.

We could seek to clarify in international law that any use of nuclear weapons, in any circumstance, will necessarily and automatically constitute a war crime. For that to happen, the 93 current signatories to the TPNW could act more effectively as a bloc, so they can't be divided by the Nuclear Nine. And there's a key role for the larger, more influential non-nuclear states like Brazil, Indonesia, Australia and South Africa to join forces, and maintain an alliance to keep up the political momentum.

## **3. Grow citizens movements in all of our countries**

We need to redouble our demands for governments to pledge to work towards disarmament and to join good-faith UN efforts towards that end. Taking inspiration from the climate movement, we should demand legally binding parliamentary timetables for disarmament. And just as the climate COPs are huge, very public affairs, garnering the world's media attention, so we need to bring the biennial meetings of the TPNW out of their UN headquarters in New York and give them the oxygen of publicity, so the issue of nuclear disarmament can more easily be the subject of public and political pressure.

In particular, we need to focus on the "universalisation" of the Treaty, as set out in Article 12, which states: "Each State Party shall encourage States not party to this Treaty to sign, ratify, accept, approve or accede to the Treaty, with the goal of universal adherence of all States to the Treaty." There needs to be some real power put behind this universalisation objective.

A first demand would be to move nuclear weapons off hair trigger alert, to cancel launch-on-warning postures and to ensure no-first-use commitments from all nuclear weapons states.

This could happen very quickly and be applied by all parties with international verification, helping to build trust for further disarmament measures.

## **Conclusion**

Governments across the world have shown that it's possible to come together to develop nuclear-free zones: they exist in the South Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Africa. This is what can be done when there is the political will. And so we pledge ourselves to continue to build that political will until we reach a nuclear-free world.