

Contribution for session one: Cooperation for the abolition of nuclear weapons, survival of humanity, peace and justice in the world:

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On behalf of CND I am honoured to bring greetings to this conference, and to the peace and disarmament movement internationally. Today our thoughts are with the Hibakusha, the survivors of the atomic bombs. You continue to inspire and motivate our work, and in your name we will continue until our shared goal of global abolition is achieved.

Today our world is facing a number of severe interlocking crises which make nuclear use more likely. These crises expedite the degradation and destruction of human life, our health, the environment and natural world, and indeed the future of our planet. But the pandemic, climate catastrophe and environmental destruction are not natural disasters – they all result from the way society and production are currently organised. As we have seen, the pandemic is not just a global health crisis: it also exacerbates the economic and social crises which follow from almost forty years of neo-liberal globalisation.

So the degeneration of late capitalism is wreaking havoc, not only in environmental and economic terms, but politically and in terms of onslaughts on democracy, the ascent of fake news, the brutalisation of communities, the rise of the far right and destruction of our rights. But at the same time we are heartened by the upsurge, particularly from young people, who refuse to accept this wave of barbarism, both in the United States itself, and across the world. The Black Lives Matter movement has shown that people power is a force to be reckoned with and we share their goals – of an end to discrimination and of peace and justice for all.

In Britain – as in many other countries - the pandemic has exposed the disastrous failure of government policy which sees security in terms of the capacity to kill, and which sees national status in terms of possession of weapons of mass destruction. This remains the primary reason for British possession of nuclear weapons – to secure us a seat at the so-called ‘top table’ of global power politics.

But our politicians have failed to actually make us secure. For some years, pandemics have been designated as tier one threats to our security. Successive National Security Risk Assessments have rightly identified such human health crises as worthy of the highest level of concern and planning. So why was Britain unprepared for the coronavirus, with insufficient equipment, staff and infrastructure to serve its people?

But we don't have to look far to see what has gone wrong. The last two security strategies have designated the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and use as a tier two threat. Below that of pandemics. Yet the governments that produced these risk assessments chose to pour – without question and consideration – £205 billion into a new nuclear weapons system to ‘meet’ this lower level threat. At the same time our health system was left chronically underfunded by years of austerity cuts and rendered unable to meet the challenge of a pandemic.

We are also facing an increasingly dangerous military situation driven most alarmingly by Trump's policies. His withdrawal from key treaties, the possibility of the resumption of nuclear testing, all increase the risk of nuclear war. Of course we understand the context for this: the US is a declining power economically and seeks to assert itself militarily. This has been the case for some time – noticeable under the Bush administration where he sought to compel non-compliant states to bend to US will. Trump's drive to war is far more dangerous. The US National Security Strategy focuses on what it describes as strategic rivals or competitors, notably China and Russia; its goal is to be able to defeat them militarily, to prepare for war on a massive scale. And Trump's Nuclear Posture Review referred to so-called usable nuclear weapons. These are now produced and deployed.

Taking these two strategies together, it is clear that there is a significant danger of a US war on China, and that opposing this is a fundamental task for the movement today. This is a conflict where nuclear weapons will be used and we need to work with all our strength to prevent such a war.

There are massive challenges facing humanity and we need to tackle these together as an international community. This is not the time to be manufacturing conflicts.

So all these issues make the abolition of nuclear weapons more pressing and it is profoundly to be welcomed that ratifications of the TPNW are steadily mounting towards the 50 required to bring it into force.

But we are well aware that the UK government is opposed to the TPNW as are the other nuclear weapons states. Once the treaty comes into force, the real challenge will be to make it impact on the nuclear weapons states. Mass pressure from citizens is crucial to bring change. We need popular mobilisations, especially in the context of the pandemic, where resources need to move from military expenditure to meeting human need.

The last time I spoke at your conference in Hiroshima was in 2003, when the movement against the war on Iraq was a mighty global force and the terrible impact of the illegal US and UK war on Iraq was clear for all to see. At that time we discussed the factors that had enabled the movement to grow and strengthen in the way it did and to play a significant political role. The three essential elements for the movement at that time were unity, diversity and international cooperation. They remain essential today. If we are to succeed in our goal of nuclear abolition, if we are to help ensure the survival of humanity and usher in a new era of peace and justice, then those are the principles on which we must found our work.

The struggle for peace and nuclear disarmament belongs to us all, to our diverse communities, across all borders – there are no national solutions to the problems we face, only international ones. And in unity, together, we will prevail.

Kate Hudson

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