

Opening Plenary, 2023 World Conference against A and H Bombs - Nagasaki (August 7, 2023)

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Greetings to the 2023 World Conference against A & H Bombs, on behalf of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. We are very aware that our government here in Britain plays a significant role in worsening the nuclear problems facing the world today. As a result, we take our disarmament responsibilities very seriously and are doing everything we can to reverse our government's policies at this time when nuclear dangers are escalating.

In June, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute announced that the decades' long trend of nuclear weapons reductions, has gone into reverse. There has been a small but significant global increase in operational warheads. We were disturbed to see that Britain got a special mention, for as the report said, while it "is not thought to have increased its nuclear weapon arsenal in 2022, the warhead stockpile is expected to grow" in the future. This follows the 2021 decision to increase Britain's warhead limit by over 40 percent.

This increase in nuclear warheads is mirrored by increasing British spending on nuclear weapons. As announced in the government's Defence Command Paper in July, the Ministry of Defence will receive an extra £6 billion over the next few years, for spending on the so-called defence nuclear enterprise. This is on top of the extra £3 billion already announced in this year's budget, and the over £205 billion being spent on replacing the current system.

The wider context for this nuclear escalation is the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The war has increased both the risk of nuclear use and its normalisation in the public consciousness.

Inflammatory rhetoric by the Russian president, the reported movement of Russian 'tactical' nukes to Belarus, and the anticipated movement of US upgraded B61-12 nuclear weapons to Europe – including to Britain – significantly increase these risks.

Of course nuclear dangers are not limited to the Eurasian landmass. Increasing tensions internationally contribute to global dangers. These are exacerbated by the AUKUS pact of which the UK is part, with its widely condemned capacity for nuclear proliferation. Global NATO ambitions, and the assignment of UK nukes to NATO, risk UK involvement in wider conflicts.

So we face many challenges here in Britain, as we do in all nuclear weapons states. As we prepare for our annual conference this autumn, we are giving priority to increasing public awareness of nuclear dangers and of the impact of nuclear weapons use. Our strong determination, as a mass campaigning organisation, is to maximise the impact of public opinion to prevent nuclear use. We well remember our slogan from the 1980s: Protest and Survive, and that message is just as relevant today as it was at the height of the cold war.

We are determined to bring the impact of nuclear use home to our communities, emphasising the return of US nukes to Britain and how it puts us all on the front line.

Central to all this work is the crucial importance of strengthening our movement, rebuilding our civil society alliances, and strengthening our activist base.

International cooperation and solidarity is central to our work and we join you today in recommitting to a world free of nuclear weapons.

We say: No more Hiroshimas – No more Nagasakis!