

Rt Hon Liz Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
London
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8 June 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

We are a broad group of UK civil society organisations, faith groups, academics and scientists. We write today to urge you to send UK diplomats to observe the First Meeting of States Parties of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), taking place in Vienna from 21-23 June 2022. We also call on the UK to attend the associated Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by the Austrian Government on 20 June. By doing so, the UK would be building on its participation in the original Vienna conference on this issue in 2014.

While nuclear weapons continue to exist, populations across the world live under constant and imminent existential threat. Since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, this threat has increased to levels not seen since the height of the Cold War. A momentary lapse of judgment, technical failure, cyber attack or miscalculation could result in nuclear armageddon - intentionally or by accident.

Successive UK Governments have described their nuclear weapons in sterile terms, as tools to increase the UK's political and military credibility and "deter" attack. More than two thirds of states question this approach, as do faith leaders¹, mayors² and an ever increasing coalition of civil society organisations from around the world³. These entities instead highlight the humanitarian consequences of a global security system underpinned by nuclear weapons. The movement to examine humanitarian consequences and risks resulted in the creation of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

A significant part of the Treaty relates to the legacy of harm and the ongoing suffering caused by past nuclear weapons testing and use, and offers a way forward for victim assistance and environmental remediation. States parties will be working towards these aims - the first international framework to address these legacies - but others can contribute too. As a country that has carried out 45 nuclear weapons test explosions, this opportunity is especially relevant for the UK Government. The health impacts suffered by veterans and indigenous populations remain woefully under-assessed and largely dismissed by successive UK Governments - through this framework the UK has an opportunity to address this.

In Kiribati (a state party to the TPNW where the UK previously tested nuclear weapons) the Kiritimati Association of Cancer Patients Affected by the British and American Bomb tests has reported numerous health problems that they attribute to the testing. As of 2018 this Association identified at least 48 survivors in Kiribati who had experienced the tests first hand as well as 800 descendants. Many have health problems consistent with exposure to radiation including blindness, hearing problems, cancers, heart disease, and reproductive difficulties. They report that their children and grandchildren have suffered similar illnesses and other intergenerational effects⁴.

¹ See for example, Anglican leaders [here](#) and Catholic leaders [here](#) speaking out in support of the TPNW

² See for example, Mayors for Peace [here](#)

³ There are over 600 [ICAN partners](#) across 107 countries

⁴ Addressing Humanitarian and Environmental Harm from Nuclear Weapons Kiritimati (Christmas) and Malden Islands - report by Dr. Matthew Bolton, International Disarmament Institute, Pace University, New York, USA.
https://ny.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Kiritimati-PosObs-Country-Report-15-2ijrrzn.pdf

Countries including Kiribati will come together to take steps towards operationalising the victim assistance and environmental remediation elements of the TPNW at the first Meeting of States Parties this June. All those who have not ratified the Treaty have been invited to attend as observers to support progress on the shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons, through which they could engage substantively with the humanitarian and sustainable development objectives that addressing nuclear legacies would serve.

There is a moral imperative for the UK to participate given the suffering that Britain's tests have caused. The classified information and technical knowledge that the UK possesses also means UK engagement on this agenda would be of significant practical value. In this regard, we would appreciate a response from the Government as to whether they will engage with states parties to the TPNW, such as Kiribati, and others, where privileged UK information and expertise could significantly assist this programme of work. At the meeting of states parties, Kiribati and other affected states parties are expected to commit to conducting initial knowledge-gathering and assessments regarding the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing on their populations and territories: cooperation from the UK Government here would likely be highly valuable.

Constructive participation by nuclear weapons states in Vienna will also help breathe new life into the faltering Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Indeed engaging on matters related to victim assistance and environmental remediation will directly assist implementation of the 2010 NPT outcome document which contains objectives relating to the remediation of nuclear contamination relating to human populations and affected areas⁵.

Dialogue, openness and values-based multilateralism are core principles of the UK's Integrated Review. We urge the UK to uphold this commitment by attending the First Meeting of States Parties - an inclusive United Nations-mandated forum - to cooperate on this shared agenda. We urge you to listen to those affected by the UK's nuclear testing and participate constructively towards the humanitarian aims of the Treaty.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Donaldson United Nations Association - UK (UNA-UK)

Brian M Quail Scottish Catholic Worker

Carol Acutt Soka Gakkai International-UK (SGI-UK)

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⁵ 2010 NPT outcome document, paragraphs 70 and 71: https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2010_fd_part_i.pdf

Dr Rebecca Johnson	Acronym Inst for Disarmament Diplomacy (AIDD)
Dr Stuart Parkinson	Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR)
Elizabeth Minor	Article 36
Fiona MacGregor	Hastings Against War
Gari Donn	UN House Scotland
Gina Langton	80000 Voices
Helen Martins	
Hilary Evans	Kingston Peace Council/CND
Iain Overton	Action on Armed Violence
Imti Choonara	Derby Peace week
Janet Fenton	WILPF (Scottish Branch)
Joan West	Cumbria and Lancashire Area CND
John Cooper	Fellowship of Reconciliation
Jude Levermore	The Methodist Church in Britain
Kate Hudson	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)
Kim Holroyd	Hereford Peace Council

Lucy Tiller	Youth for TPNW
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Sally Reynolds	Abingdon Peace Group
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Sue Claydon	Anglican Pacifist Fellowship
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Tim Devereux	Movement for the Abolition of War