

**The Rt Hon David Cameron**

Secretary of State  
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

16 November 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you as concerned NGO experts, scientists and academics, to urge the UK to send representatives of the UK Government to observe the proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of States Parties (2MSP) of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in New York, 27 November - 1 December 2023.

Alongside the business undertaken by State Parties, the meeting is an important opportunity for nuclear-armed states to listen, learn, and where possible, respond to concerns raised. As a non-signatory observer, the UK would be able to, inter alia, offer expertise on verification and address concerns around the Faslane nuclear base including any contingency plans for their nuclear weapons given the possibility of an independent Scotland. The meeting is also an opportunity to respond to the indisputable harm caused by the UK's nuclear testing, which is the principal focus of this letter.

As a nuclear armed state which has undertaken 98 nuclear weapon tests in Australia, Kiribati and the USA between 1952 and 1991, this agenda should be of particular interest and relevance to the UK Government. We are concerned by a wide range of past and ongoing harms associated with the UK's nuclear programme. Through the TPNW's working group on victim assistance, environmental remediation, international cooperation and assistance (Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty), an important new avenue and the first international legal framework to help address these has been established.

The Republic of Kiribati is a State Party to the TPNW and is implementing a programme of work to understand and respond to what took place on its territory. This includes assessments around the human and environmental consequences of the nine British thermonuclear tests that took place in 1957-58 while the territory was under British colonial control as well as the facilitation of a further 24 tests conducted by the USA. At the 2MSP, Kiribati will present its initial assessments and discuss needs for support. The UK Government should be in attendance to hear the evidence presented directly when considering its response.

The physical and mental health effects and social, economic, and cultural impacts of nuclear testing in Kiribati persist to this day, not only for those directly affected, but for the descendants of those affected by ionising radiation and other aspects of the testing programme such as enforced displacement of populations and lack of access to lands. The health problems consistent with exposure to radiation that indigenous populations – as well as military veterans – associated with the UK's tests remain unacknowledged and under-assessed by successive UK Governments.

In September 2023, Kiribati's President Taneti Maamau [addressed](#) the UN General Assembly, highlighting the health impact of nuclear testing on Kiribati's people and declaring that their "ancestral land had been exploited". In August 2023, during a meeting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a Kiribati diplomat [urged](#) the

nuclear armed states - which includes the UK - to engage in “information exchanges” to help Kiribati to assess the harm that has been caused while also raising the issue of compensation.

We urge the UK to respond to these calls, and for their recognition of the harms experienced and the need for compensation and remediation in Kiribati’s affected communities. The UK’s active engagement in the process is vital. We call on the UK to provide all relevant information and offer expertise to support the TPNW’s programme of work in this regard.

The UK has failed to attend various international meetings discussing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, has [dismissed](#) the TPNW process and refused to engage on this issue at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Most recently, in October 2023 in the UN General Assembly, the UK voted against a new [resolution](#) tabled by Kazakhstan and Kiribati on ‘Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons,’ which recognises and urges further international action to assist the victims of nuclear weapons use and testing, such as Kiribati’s affected communities and British nuclear test veterans. This vote, which was passed with an overwhelming majority, put the UK at odds with almost all NATO countries, who voted in favour (excepting the USA, who abstained, and France, who voted against), and together with just three other states including North Korea and Russia. The UK’s position is further isolated as fellow NATO states, Germany and Norway, have now formally confirmed with the UN Secretariat that they will observe 2MSP.

In its explanation of the vote, the UK said it had voted against the resolution as it did not reflect the UK’s position on the legacy of its nuclear tests. It voted specifically against paragraphs that: recognised that the consequences of nuclear testing cross borders; acknowledged the trauma caused by as well as the physical health impacts of nuclear testing; and deplored the suffering of those affected. The UK also appeared to suggest in its explanation of vote that taking measures to address the legacies of nuclear testing could be incompatible with the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The CTBT does not deal with responding to nuclear legacies, and such measures could only be complementary to it: the government must clarify this statement.

We urge the UK to address its responsibilities and take all avenues to engage with the movement to address the harms associated with the UK’s and other states’ nuclear testing. This should begin with attendance at 2MSP, and constructively engaging with states parties’ work on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Becky Alexis-Martin, Lecturer of Peace and international Development, University of Bradford**

**Dr Matthew Bolton, Director, International Disarmament Institute, Pace University**

**Sue Claydon, Chair, Anglican Pacifist Fellowship**

**John Cooper, Director, The Fellowship of Reconciliation**

**Ben Donaldson, Co-Convener of the ICAN UK Network**

**Dr Gari Donn, Executive Director, UN House Scotland and Co-Convener, ICAN UK Network; member of ICAN Int Steering Group**

**Janet Fenton, ICAN Scottish Partners Liaison and Secretary, Scottish Parliament Nuclear Disarmament CPG, Organiser Secure Scotland**

**Jill Gough, National Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Cymru**

**Barbara Hardcastle, Chair, Merseyside Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

**Dr Kristien Hintjens, GP Montrose**

**Dr Kate Hudson, General Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

**Andrew Jackson, Chief Executive, Pax Christi England and Wales**

**Lynn Jamieson, Chair, Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

**Dr Rebecca E. Johnson FRSA, Executive Director, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy and Co-Convener of the ICAN UK Network**

**Brian Jones, Vice Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Cymru**

**Gina Langton, CEO & Founder, 80,000 Voices**

**Elizabeth Minor, Advisor, Article 36**

**Cllr Lawrence O'Neill, Chair UK & Ireland, Nuclear Free Local Authorities**

**Angie Pankhania, Chief Operating Officer, United Nations Association - UK**

**Dr Stuart Parkinson, Executive Director, Scientists for Global Responsibility**

**Ereti Tekabaia, Kiritimati Tourism**

**Teeua Tekonau, Kiritimati Nuclear Test Cancer Survivors**

**Kaitama Toroto, Kiritimati Regional Councillor**

**Dr Elizabeth Waterston, Medact Nuclear Weapons Groups**

**Dave Webb, Chair, Yorkshire Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

**Peter Wilson, Chair, Merseyside Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

**Taniel Yusuf, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom UK**