

PHA Policy on Promoting Nuclear Disarmament

Introduction

New Zealand has made a relatively substantial contribution to international nuclear disarmament efforts in the past three decades. It mounted substantial opposition to French nuclear testing, promoted a South Pacific nuclear free zone, enacted a national nuclear weapon free zone in legislation¹, and contributed to getting nuclear weapons declared to be generally illegal by the International Court of Justice. More recently the New Zealand Government has been active with other “New Agenda” countries in the promotion of a convention on the elimination of nuclear weapons (a model convention has been drafted²).

There has been a long history of NGO and citizen activity against nuclear weapons testing and the nuclear arms race in New Zealand.^{3 4 5 6} The PHA (NZ) has already played a role in advocating against nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific and it notes that other PHA’s around the world have nuclear disarmament policies – including the World Federation of Public Health Associations (see the appendices).

The Public Health Association notes that:

The Current Threat from Nuclear Weapons: With the end of the Cold War the threat of nuclear war between the United States and Russia has declined dramatically. Nevertheless, the pace of disarmament has been slow and both nations retain huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons (over 20 000). Indeed, some forms of nuclear weapons development are still under way in the US⁷ and there is still a risk that tensions between the two nations could increase again (eg, over missile defence, the militarisation of space, NATO expansion issues and dangerous diplomatic incidents). There may also be a small risk of accidental release of nuclear weapons.^{8 9 10}

¹ New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act 1987.

² IALANA, INESAP, IPPNW. Security and Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Cambridge, Mass: International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 1999.

³ Clements K. Back from the Brink: The creation of a nuclear-free New Zealand. Allen and Unwin, 1988.

⁴ Dewes K, Green R. The World Court Project: How a citizen network can influence the United Nations. Pacific Review 1995; 7: 12-37.

⁵ Dewes K, Green R. Aotearoa / New Zealand at the World Court. Christchurch: Disarmament and Security Centre, 1999.

⁶ Abolition 2000. Abolition of Nuclear Weapons: A New Zealand Perspective. Wellington: Abolition 2000, 1998.

⁷ Mello G. The Old Designing Fever. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 2000; 56(1): 51-7.

⁸ Sagan SD. The Limits of Safety: Organizations, accidents and nuclear weapons. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

⁹ Perrow C. Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

¹⁰ Blair BG, Kendall HW. Accidental nuclear war. Scientific American 1990; (December): 19-23.

However, the most probable nuclear war in the medium term is probably between India and Pakistan since both countries have these weapons and have a long history of poor relations (including three major wars). Indeed, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* considered the developments in India and Pakistan as a reason for moving the hands of their symbolic doomsday clock forward to nine minutes to midnight.¹¹

Regional nuclear war in the Middle East is also a possibility since Israel has a significant nuclear arsenal¹² and some other regional powers are possibly developing such weapons (eg, Iran).

Given the ongoing difficulties relating to Taiwan, a nuclear conflict between China and the US cannot be ruled out in the short-term. Missile defence is also a source of dispute between these nations and one that may lead to China increasing its nuclear weapons stockpile.

Terrorist use of nuclear weapons is also a possibility. The existence of so many thousands of nuclear weapons and over a thousand tonnes of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium also poses risks that these materials will be obtained by terrorists, especially with the sub-optimal security provisions that appear to exist in Russia.¹³

Potential impact on New Zealand of nuclear war: Work in the 1980s suggested that New Zealand would suffer massive social and economic collapse if there was a major Northern Hemisphere nuclear war.¹⁴ The impact of radiation in Southern Hemisphere countries was considered to be relatively small compared to the health consequences of economic collapse of trading nations. Subsequent international work reiterated the major problems that Southern Hemisphere countries would face in a post nuclear war world – including disruptions to the environment and agriculture from possible nuclear winter effects.^{15 16} There would also be economic and social repercussions in New Zealand of a regional nuclear war between India and Pakistan and small quantities of radiation would be expected to reach Southern Hemisphere countries such as New Zealand.¹⁷

Opportunity cost of nuclear armaments: Nuclear weapons development and maintenance is exceeding expensive eg, \$US 4 trillion for US nuclear weapons to date.¹⁸ This expenditure represents a huge diversion of resources away from the promotion of social and economic development (particularly in poor nuclear weapon states such as India, Pakistan and China).

¹¹ Editorial. Nine minutes to midnight. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 1998; 54: 4-5.

¹² Hersh SM. *The Sampson Option, Israel, America and the Bomb*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.

¹³ Lee R. Smuggling update. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 1997; 53(3): 11-14.

¹⁴ Preddey GF, Wilkins PC, Wilson NA, Kjellstrom TE, Williamson BR. *Nuclear Disaster, A Report to the Commission for the Future*. Wellington: Government Printer, 1982.

¹⁵ Pittcock AB, Ackerman TP, Crutzen PJ, et al. *Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War SCOPE 28, Volume I, Physical and Atmospheric Effects*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1986.

¹⁶ Harwell MA, Hutchinson TC. *Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War SCOPE 28, Volume II, Ecological and Agricultural Effects*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1985.

¹⁷ Wilson N. *Regional Nuclear War in South Asia: Effects on Surrounding Countries*. *Medicine & Global Survival* 1999; 6: 24-7. [<http://www.ipnww.org/MGS/>]

¹⁸ The Nuclear Weapons Cost Study Project Committee. *Four trillion dollars and counting*. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 1995; 51(6).

The PHA affirms the following principles:

- That warfare is a major global public health hazard and that all efforts should be made by the nuclear weapon states to eliminate their weapons of mass destruction.
- That all nations should respect international law – which declares that the use of nuclear weapons is generally illegal (and that nuclear weapon states have are obliged to move rapidly to the elimination of nuclear weapons).¹⁹
- That even small nations such as New Zealand can play a disproportionately important role in international disarmament activities.²⁰

The PHA believes the following steps should be taken:

- That the New Zealand Government continue to actively promote an international treaty on the elimination of nuclear weapons according to an agreed timeframe.
- That the New Zealand Government continue to work towards the development of a Southern Hemisphere Nuclear Weapon Free Zone.

Policy linkages

This policy is linked domestically to the PHA policy on reform of the gun laws in New Zealand. Internationally it is linked to efforts aimed at tighter control of small arms and reducing gun violence and injury.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years beginning in mid-2003.

Adopted by the AGM July 2001

¹⁹ Green R. *The Naked Nuclear Emperor: Debunking nuclear deterrence*. Christchurch: Disarmament and Security Centre, 2000.

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). *Disarmament and Arms Control Information Bulletin*. Wellington: MFAT (No 62), 2000.

Appendix 1: WFPHA Resolution

The following details have been obtained from the American Public Health Association web site (<http://www.apha.org/wfpha/weapons.htm>).

Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

The World Federation of Public Health Associations,

Noting that in 1993 the World Health Organization adopted a resolution calling for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legality of the use of nuclear weapons and that the Court ruled on 8 July 1996 by a unanimous vote that nations have "an obligation to pursue in good faith and to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects;"

Recognizing that there continue to exist over 37,000 nuclear weapons on the earth which pose a threat to the health and survival of human civilization and the global environment (1); and that, even with full implementation of existing arms control treaties, by the year 2003 there will be over 20,000 nuclear weapons, or the equivalent explosive force equal to 350,000 Hiroshima nuclear bombs (2) (3);

Concerned about the public health hazards created by nuclear weapons testing, whether conducted in the atmosphere or underground;

Noting that the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, comprised of prominent physicians, political leaders, generals, and scientists from both the nuclear weapons states and other nations, released on 14 August 1996 a report outlining a plan for the total abolition of nuclear weapons and reaffirming disarmament as the world's only option;

Aware that in December 1996 a large group of senior military officers from countries around the world issued a statement declaring "that the continuing existence of nuclear weapons in the armories of nuclear powers, and the ever-present threat of acquisition of these weapons by others, constitutes a peril to global peace and security and to the safety and survival of the people we are dedicated to protect" (4);

1. URGES all nations of the world to ratify promptly the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and to permanently respect the moratorium on explosive nuclear weapons testing, currently being formally observed by the declared nuclear weapons nations and informally observed by the undeclared nuclear weapons nations;

2. CALLS upon all nations to initiate immediately and conclude by the year 2000 negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention that commits the world to a firm timetable for the permanent elimination of nuclear weapons under strict and effective international control.

References:

1. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Abolition 2000 Handbook for a World Without Nuclear Weapons, November 1995, p. 20.
2. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and the Institute of Energy and Environmental Research. Radioactive Heaven and Earth: the Health and Environmental Effects of Nuclear Weapons Testing In, On, and Above the Earth. New York: The Apex Press, 1991 and Makhijani A., Hu H., Yih K. (eds): Nuclear Wastelands, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
3. Figures based on the latest available information from the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Arms Control Association, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and U.S. government sources.
4. Statement on Nuclear Weapons by International Generals and Admirals, State of the World Forum, The Washington Post, 5 December 1996.

Implementation Suggestions:

1. Send copy of the resolution to relevant government officials and heads of UN agencies.
2. Send copy of the resolution to relevant health and peace organizations, including IPPNW and Physicians for Social Responsibility.
3. Join Abolition 2000 international campaign.

Sponsored by Canadian Public Health Association and American Public Health Association

WFPHA Resolution No. 97-1 adopted by WFPHA General Assembly at 31st Annual Meeting 5 May 1997

Appendix 2: PHA Australia Policy

The following details have been obtained from the Public Health Association of Australia web site (http://www.pha.org.au/policy/frame_policyinitiatives.html).

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Public Health Association of Australia recalls its previous resolutions "War as a public health issue" (1990) and "Nuclear weapons and public health" (1992).

The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:

1. The end of the Cold War has changed but not ended the unacceptable public health threat from tens of thousands of nuclear weapons.
2. If the US-CIS Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties are fully implemented, by the year 2003, 20,000 nuclear weapons will remain in those countries. The treaties in fact perpetuate the threat of nuclear conflict by allowing for the modernisation of nuclear weapons systems and for the development of nuclear defences in outer space. Despite its willingness to reduce the number of its warheads, the United States has not lessened its reliance on nuclear weapons and plans to spend US\$350 billion on nuclear war preparations over the next decade. A new generation of nuclear weapons is in development.
3. Control of former Soviet nuclear weapons has become destabilised through recent political realignments, social upheaval, regional conflicts and possibly through sales of weapons.
4. As the US and former USSR plan reductions, France and the United Kingdom plan substantial increases in their nuclear arsenals.
5. A comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty has not yet been concluded.
6. Continued policies of security through nuclear deterrence increase risks of nuclear proliferation, standoffs and blackmail, increasing the likelihood that these weapons will one day be used in anger or by accident.
7. Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel to extract plutonium, and the stockpiling and long-distance transport of plutonium, such as by Japan, pose serious health and environmental hazards as well as adverse effects on security and increased risks of nuclear weapons proliferation.
8. Nuclear weapons technology and materials continue to proliferate around the world. Nine countries suspected of trying to develop or acquire nuclear weapons may soon be added to the 11 known to possess nuclear weapons in 1993, exponentially increasing the likelihood of their use.
9. While conventions to ban other major types of weapons of mass destruction - biological and chemical - have been concluded, no treaty or convention exists which specifically bans the use of nuclear weapons, the weapon of mass destruction with the greatest potential for harm.

The Public Health Association of Australia resolves:

10. To urge the Australian Government to make the creation of an effective international instrument to ban the production, use and trade of nuclear weapons its highest foreign policy priority.

11. To actively promote efforts to argue for the illegality of the use and threat to use nuclear weapons under international law including through the use of the International Court of Justice.

Adopted at the 1993 Annual General Meeting of the Public Health Association of Australia and amended at the 1995 Annual General Meeting.