

New campaign to achieve global nuclear disarmament

Alison Whyte introduces a new global campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and discusses some hopeful signs of progress.

There are still more than 25,000 nuclear weapons around the world¹. The use of even 100 Hiroshima-size weapons could lead to tens of millions of deaths and severe global climatic consequences (see p.1). This is within the capacity of the arsenals of not only the USA and Russia, but also China, France, and the UK.

The Nuclear Weapon States are currently developing new, more usable weapons and proliferation is an extremely serious problem. Nuclear technology and material are widely available and often poorly secured, and hence a potential target for terrorists. The last major international negotiations on nuclear disarmament in 2005 broke up without agreement. Against a background of increasing global instability – due to problems such as resource depletion, climate change, and poverty – the threat from nuclear weapons is again growing.

In response to this situation, a new global campaign was launched in April 2007 by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). Known as ICAN – the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons – it is calling for a 'Nuclear Weapons Convention' that would prohibit the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. This would be similar in structure to the existing Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. It would build on the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), addressing both disarmament and non-proliferation – abolishing nuclear weapons, securing fissile materials and preventing their further production.

The UK wing of ICAN was set up earlier this year, co-ordinated by Medact. Its partners are listed in the box (above right) and include SGR.

The case for a nuclear weapons convention

The case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) is laid out in a report called *Securing Our Survival*^{2,3}. This presents a draft model international treaty for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons

worldwide. The NWC cuts through the widely held perception that global nuclear disarmament is an unrealistic dream. It offers a vision of what a nuclear-weapon-free world might look like and provides a way for people to see how nuclear disarmament could actually take place, showing the practical steps that could lead to nuclear weapons being safely eliminated by all parties.

The model NWC contains detailed provisions for national implementation, reporting and verification, and the establishment of an international agency responsible for enforcement and dispute settlement. States that are parties to the Convention would be required to declare all nuclear weapons, nuclear material, nuclear facilities and nuclear weapon delivery vehicles they possess or control, and their locations.

The model Convention outlines five phases for the elimination of nuclear weapons:

1. taking nuclear weapons off 'alert' status (see p.1);
2. removing weapons from deployment;
3. removing nuclear warheads from their delivery vehicles;
4. disabling the warheads;
5. removing the fissile material and placing it under international control.

In the initial phases the US and Russia are required to make the deepest cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

Governments are the principal protagonists but civil society would play an important role. The scientific, medical, legal, and policy expertise of non-governmental organisations would make them key partners in the process. Also, some of the expertise of the scientists and engineers at nuclear weapons facilities would be needed to ensure the disarmament process was effective.

The model NWC does *not* undermine existing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regimes, and verification and compliance arrangements. It builds on the NPT, International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, the international monitoring system of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation, and bilateral agreements between Russia and the United States.

ICAN Partners in the UK

Abolition 2000 UK
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Greenpeace UK
Movement for Abolition of War
Pax Christi British Section
Scientists for Global Responsibility
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom UK
World Court Project UK

The potential for progress

There is significant potential for progress. Some recent activities by political leaders and other influential figures give some cause for optimism. And once government attitudes change, a NWC could be achieved very quickly. The Partial Test Ban Treaty, for example, was concluded in 10 days of determined negotiation in July 1963 after years of deadlock.

The recent initiatives and statements on global nuclear disarmament have been wide ranging:

- In December 2006 at the UN General Assembly, 125 governments – including nuclear-armed China, India and Pakistan – called upon states to fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations immediately “*by commencing multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a NWC*”.
- In two well-publicised letters in the Wall Street Journal (the second being in January this year), senior former US politicians George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn called for total abolition of nuclear weapons. This does seem to have influenced the presidential candidates, with both having subsequently made public comments supporting the goal of a “world without nuclear weapons”, and Barack Obama making clear commitments to act if he is elected.⁴
- Also in January this year, during a visit to Delhi, Gordon Brown made this remarkable pledge, which was hardly reported in the UK: “*In the run-up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in 2010 we will be at the forefront of the international campaign to... ultimately achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons*.”⁵
- In June, Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd announced the establishment of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Commission, an international body that would build policy and political momentum towards the 2010 NPT review conference.

Opinion polls clearly demonstrate that a majority of citizens – including those of Nuclear Weapon States – also overwhelmingly want a nuclear-weapon-free future. So now is the time to deliver it.

Action

Ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion 72 calling on the government “to work to achieve progress on multilateral negotiations with the aim of achieving implementation of a nuclear weapons convention by 2020”. To find your MP, go to www.theyworkforyou.com

Alison Whyte is a freelance journalist and media advisor to Medact, an organisation of health professionals campaigning on global issues.

References

1. Federation of American Scientists (2008). Status of World Nuclear Forces 2008. <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nukestatus.html>
2. IPPNW, INESAP, IALANA (2007). Securing Our Survival: the Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. <http://www.icanw.org/securing-our-survival>
3. Medact (2008). Securing Our Survival – summary. <http://www.icanw.org/files/SOSSummaryIntlFin.pdf>
4. Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (2008). 2008 Presidential Candidate Quotes. http://www.wagingpeace.org/menu/resources/survey/s/2008_pres_cand/cand_quotes_page.php
5. Brown G. (2008). Speech at the Chamber of Commence in Delhi. 21 January. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page14323.asp>

Metrix Consortium members

Training partners

QinetiQ
AgustaWestland
City & Guilds
EDS
Nord Anglia Education
Raytheon
Serco
The Open University

Estate partners

Land Securities Trillium
Currie & Brown
Dalkia
Laing O'Rourke
Sodexo

The St Athan Defence Training Academy: the future of British education?

Stuart Tannock discusses the disturbing implications of the Ministry of Defence's new multi-billion pound training academy.

Britain's largest education and technology investment project in recent memory has been developing quietly under the public's radar. It is time we paid attention. In January 2007, the Ministry of Defence awarded an £11 billion contract to the private Metrix Consortium (see Box) to build a massive new training centre for the British armed forces at the village of St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan, South Wales.

St Athan, which is expected to become one of the world's biggest military training establishments when it opens in 2013, will provide specialist training in engineering, communications and information systems technology to all three services of the British military. For the first time, it will centralise in one location military training that is currently done in sites across the country.

Supporters of St Athan emphasise that the Academy will use state-of-the-art technology and training methods such as neurolinguistic programming, e-learning technologies, computer-based training, computer-aided instruction, emulation, simulation and web-based systems. St Athan, they claim, “*breathes life into the classroom of the future model which for many years now has been anticipated by futurologists and thought leaders in the education community.*” St Athan represents a “*model for training in this country*” that will enable Britain to realise Lord Leitch's vision of gaining “*world leadership in skills.*”¹

Why should any of this worry us? There is the fundamental question of why we should support such a massive outlay of taxpayer money on a military that is still involved in fighting an illegal war in Iraq – and in a country, Britain, that already boasts the world's second-largest military budget. Beyond this, St Athan represents three developments that should be attracting extended public and political debate, but that instead have received little attention, beyond a small, local campaign against the Academy that sprung up in Wales after the project was first announced.

First, St Athan is part of a political project of privatising the British armed forces, and turns over responsibility for military training to a private, for-profit consortium. At a time when, across the Atlantic, US Congress is holding investigations into abuses perpetrated by private military companies such as Blackwater in Iraq, Britain is rushing headlong down the same path of military privatisation that the USA has gone down before. This privatisation, moreover, makes the British government a direct partner of one of the world's largest and most controversial arms dealers, Raytheon, which is a core member of the St Athan Metrix Consortium.

Second, St Athan represents a major leap forward in Britain's participation in the global arms trade. The Metrix business model for maximising profits at St Athan is to maximise the amount of training it provides, through serving not just the British military but militaries from around the world. Between 2002 and 2005, the Ministry of Defence provided military training to more than 12,000 personnel from 137 countries, many with poor human rights records.² With St Athan, this trade promises only to increase.

Third, St Athan represents another step up in the ongoing militarisation of British education. The Open University – whose Vice-Chancellor, Brenda Gourley, claims that universities should be “*beacons that reflect the very best of which the human spirit is capable*”³ – is a direct partner in the Metrix Consortium. Schools around the Vale of Glamorgan are making plans to train local youth for jobs at the St Athan Academy, while colleges and universities across South Wales, which have already been extensively militarised over the past decade, are exploring new Academy contract tie-ins.⁴ Indeed, one reason why we shouldn't expect Cardiff University, the premier institution of research and learning in the region, to lead any critical investigation into the St Athan project is that, in 2005, it signed a long-term strategic research partnership with QinetiQ, another core member of the Metrix Consortium.

Promoters of the St Athan Defence Training Academy claim that it represents the future of education in Britain. Without public investigation, debate and critique of St Athan and other military research and education projects across the country, there is a strong possibility that this will come true. If it does, it will not be for the better of Britain or anywhere else in the world.

Action

To find out more about the issue or to join the Stop the St Athan Academy campaign, see www.cynefinywerin.org.uk or www.no2militaryacademy.com

Stuart Tannock was a visiting Research Fellow at the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University from 2006-2008. He is a native of Toronto, Canada.

References

1. Swinscoe, P. (2008). The Defence Training Academy. [http://www.qinetiq.com/home_metrix_review/perspectives_on_training.MediaPar.61192.File.JS_article_PS_\(2\).pdf](http://www.qinetiq.com/home_metrix_review/perspectives_on_training.MediaPar.61192.File.JS_article_PS_(2).pdf)
2. House of Commons Hansard Written Answers (2005). Overseas Military Personnel Trained in the UK. 01/02/05. http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/vo050201/text/50201w07.htm#50201w07.html_spnw2
3. Open University Ethics Centre (2007). OU Ethics Centre Launches. <http://www.open.ac.uk/ethics-centre/centre-launch.htm>
4. South Wales Echo (2008). Academy Link Aim for New School Plan. 08/04/08; Collins, P. (2008). New Centre to Teach Skills for Local Jobs. South Wales Echo, 20/03/08.