



Statement to the assembled parties meeting in New York to negotiate a nuclear weapons ban treaty, March 2017

Churches from across the United Kingdom give thanks for the moral courage being exhibited by all the countries participating in these important negotiations. We pray that you succeed in your efforts to create a legally-binding treaty to ban nuclear weapons. On behalf of our churches we commit ourselves to working with you and supporting your efforts until all nuclear weapons have been eliminated from the face of the earth.

We also want to express disappointment in our own Government for thus far refusing to take part in this important process. In 1968 the UK Government agreed to negotiate in “good faith” for an end to the nuclear arms race. In declining to support these negotiations the UK is failing to observe that promise. In our view the UK Government is letting down not only the vast majority of countries in the world that are involved in these negotiations but also their own citizens. We assure you that millions of people in the UK want to see a world free of all nuclear weapons regardless of the lack of co-operation from our Government.

We believe that the possession and threat of use of nuclear weapons is a sin against God and humanity. We repent of our complacency in allowing this state of affairs to continue for so long. Several of the nine countries maintaining nuclear weapons, including our own, have warheads that are several times more destructive than those that were used on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The very existence of such weapons violates the dignity and worth of every human being. We affirm that the trillions of dollars being squandered on these weapons are, in the words of President Dwight D Eisenhower, “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”

Our world faces many challenges including oppressive poverty, climate change, violent extremism and emerging national rivalry. Addressing these challenges requires strong relationships across nations, founded on mutual co-operation, trust and shared prosperity. Security policies based on the threat of the use of nuclear weapons are immoral and ultimately self-defeating.

We recognise that the elimination of nuclear weapons under an internationally agreed system of verification is a big undertaking. However, we believe that this is a critical moral issue of our time and that together we can rise to this challenge. We cannot leave this threat to hang over our children and over future generations to come. It is for us to take responsibility for resolving what the late Jonathan Schell called, the final ‘unfinished business’ of the 20th century and achieve the intention of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in all its aspects.

We commend you all for your efforts and uphold you in your deliberations to achieve a treaty that will impose an unequivocal ban on all nuclear weapons.

Signed,

Revd Stephen Keyworth, Faith and Society Team Leader of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Revd Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland

Ms Rachel Lampard MBE, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain

Revd Kevin Watson, General Assembly Moderator of the United Reformed Church