

CANADIAN NETWORK TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Le Réseau canadien pour l'abolition des armes nucléaires

Canadian Nuclear Weapon Abolitionists Call on U.K. to Reconsider Warhead Increase

CNANW Statement March 25, 2021

The Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW) joins with other disarmament organizations critical of the nuclear weapons policy shift of the government of the United Kingdom. The British defence and foreign policy review, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age", would increase the number of nuclear weapons in the U.K. arsenal. It would also extend the declared purposes of nuclear deterrence to a wider range of perceived threats. Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has cautioned that "there are already too many nuclear warheads in the world, not too few." He added: "The past has shown that if one side has more nuclear weapons, the other side will try to catch up. And that is the disastrous arms race we have been in for decades."

We urge the government of British Prime Minister Johnson to reverse these regressive and provocative steps as they are in violation of treaty obligations. They carry the inherent risk of re-fueling both a nuclear and conventional arms race.

Instead of reducing to a maximum of 180 nuclear warheads from the current 195, as previously promised, the new plan moves in the opposite direction by increasing the Trident-purposed arsenal to a new cap of 260 warheads. In contrast to limiting the scope of nuclear deterrence and moving towards full elimination as required by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the UK's declared policy is being extended to "emerging technologies" and to a wider range of weapons of mass destruction.

Three former Canadian U.N. Disarmament Ambassadors quickly reacted to the U.K. policy shift.

The Honourable Douglas Roche O.C. stated that:

On February 26, 2020, the United Kingdom joined a unanimous statement by the U.N. Security Council calling on all states parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to cooperate in nuclear disarmament measures. What happened to suddenly move the U.K. government to increase its nuclear arsenal by 40 percent? This appears to be the U.K. response to the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. So much for the humanitarian movement against nuclear weapons! Power politics rears its ugly head once more. This unconscionable act, which drives ahead the nuclear arms race, jeopardizes the success of the NPT Review Conference later this year. Canada must join Germany in criticizing the U.K.'s reckless act.

Peggy Mason, who heads the Rideau Institute, further said that:

The new UK defence policy reduces transparency in that country's operational stockpile and deployed warheads. It also expands the circumstances in which it would use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT, beyond weapons of mass destruction, to include threats from unspecified "emerging

technologies” of “comparable impact”. It is hard to see these extraordinarily destabilizing actions as anything other than a desperately diminished post-Brexit Britain struggling to maintain some semblance of global prestige.

And Paul Meyer, who is also the Chair of the Canadian Pugwash Group, notes that:

At the last NPT Review Conference in 2015, the UK delivered a statement committing to limit operationally deployed warheads on its ballistic missile submarines to no more than 120 and to reduce its overall nuclear warhead stockpile to no more than 180 by the mid-2020s. The announced change in UK nuclear policy represents a betrayal of that pledge and sends the worst of all possible signals to the NPT community in the lead up to its August Review Conference. In 2015 the UK promised “to strive to build conditions for a world without nuclear weapons”. Doesn't Prime Minister Johnson's Government realize that increasing nuclear arsenals is not one of the ways to get to that goal?

CNANW joins many others in challenging the rationale of the UK's decision. Whatever the political reasons for the redirection of official United Kingdom defence policy, CNANW sees the proposal as an affront to the entry into force of the two-month-old Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and as a challenge to this year's planned Review Conference deliberations for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

We call on the Canadian government to clearly state its disappointment to its NATO ally, to urge caution and press Prime Minister Johnson to reverse the implementation of a policy that would lead to a more dangerous world with a greater likelihood of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In these days of pandemics and other global stresses, the world requires sober and thoughtful vision, with leadership that pulls us together for shared mutual security and risk reduction goals. We need to avoid -- not increase -- global risks from dangerous, and regressive policy changes.

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The Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW) was established in 1996 by representatives of national organizations that share the conviction that nuclear weapons are immoral and should be abolished.