



Fr Newell and Katrina Alton facing arrest after pouring red paint over a sign advertising the DSEI arms fair

Churches 'must back ban on nuclear arms'

Peace campaign group Pax Christi has suggested that faith leaders must play a major role in calling for an end to nuclear weapons.

"The voice of faith leaders helps to deepen the much-needed debate on the UK's belligerent role in refusing to take part in or support anything to do with the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty," Pat Gaffney, General Secretary of Pax Christi, told *The Universe*.

Ms Gaffney's comment came in response to the Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford, who warned the use of nuclear weapons is "suicide as well as genocide".

Highlighting the ban on cluster bombs, Bishop Stephen Cottrell argued that the case for outlawing nuclear arsenals was even more compelling.

"We all patted ourselves on the back a few years ago when we banned cluster bombs. Well the moral arguments about nuclear weapons are just as compelling if not more so.

"For to use a nuclear weapon is suicide as well as genocide," he told peers as they debated the UN treaty to ban nuclear weapons, supported by 122 states last year.

The meeting in New York was boycotted by all nuclear-armed nations, including Britain.

Bishop Cottrell urged the Government to engage with the disarmament process and at the very least send an observer to a UN high-level conference on nuclear disarmament, due to be held in May.

Pax Christi, the international Catholic movement for peace, welcomed his comments.

"Pax Christi is most encouraged by the contribution of Bishop Stephen Cottrell to the House of Lords' debate on nuclear weapons," commented Pat Gaffney.

"Bishop Stephen is quite right to challenge the Government to engage fully in those disarmament structures

that are already in place – the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty process and the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty process."

She continued: "The majority of the world's nations are leading on this – how can a nuclear weapon state such as ours continually refuse to take its moral and legal responsibility on this matter."

Ms Gaffney's comments also came as Catholic priest Fr Martin Newell was due to appear at Birmingham Magistrates Court for non-payment of a £515 fine.

The penalty was the result of a protest at the Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI) Arms Fair in 2009.

Fr Newell and Katrina Alton, both members of the pacifist Catholic Worker movement, poured red paint – representing the blood of the victims of the arms trade – on a sign outside advertising the arms fair as delegates waited to enter.

Both of them were arrested and fined. However, Fr Newell refused to pay the fine.

"I continued my conscientious objection to this trade in death by refusing to pay this fine," he said.

"It was a long time ago, and I do not have proof, but it is my belief that I already served a short prison sentence for this fine, as I have for others in similar situations."

He added: "However, I am willing to do the same again if necessary. I will not pay, it is a matter of conscience."

The Arms Fair is held at the EXCEL Centre in east London every other year. Arms companies and governments attend, along with military equipment such as warships and armoured cars.

As *The Universe* went to press, Fr Newell was due to appear at Birmingham Magistrates Court on Wednesday, 28th February.

Homeless 'risk referrals' will cut rough sleeping

Prisons and NHS Trusts are among the public sector organisations that will soon have a legal duty to refer people at risk of becoming homeless to a housing authority.

Heather Wheeler, the Minister for Homelessness, announced last week that, for the first time, several public bodies will be required to assist the Government's efforts in reducing the number of people sleeping rough by intervening early.

The legally binding obligation will also extend to probation services and Jobcentres.

The new guidelines come ahead of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which is expected to be passed into law this April. It places legal duties on English councils to prevent homelessness.

They will be required to ensure the advice and information provided is tailored to specific at-risk groups, which will include care leavers, people leaving prison, former members of the armed forces and survivors of domestic abuse.

Mrs Wheeler said: "Everyone should have a home to call their own and we

have put in place strong protections to guard families and individuals against the threat of homelessness.

"Our reforms – putting prevention at the heart of everything we do – are designed for lasting change and to back this up we're investing almost £1 billion over the next four years to break the homelessness cycle once and for all."

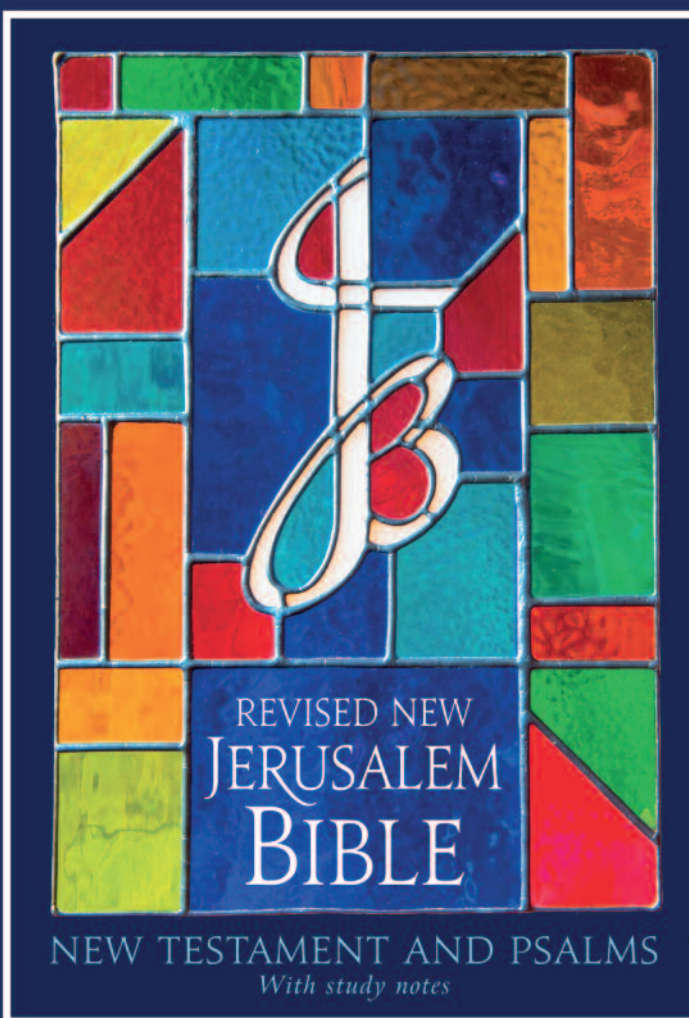
The Government has pledged £72.7 million of funding to help councils deliver these changes when they come into force this April.

The increased preventative work brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act is expected to result in substantial savings for councils in the long term.

Certain measures within the Act – such as personalised housing plans and bespoke prevention services – have already been trialled on Southwark Council in central London, who receive the third largest number of homelessness applications in England.

As a result, Southwark has eliminated its use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless families.

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