



Open Letter to Foreign Minister Boris Johnson: Support negotiating a nuclear weapons ban treaty in 2017

19th October 2016

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to urge the United Kingdom to vote in favour of an historic UN Resolution on “Taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations” that is being tabled at the United Nations General Assembly this month to mandate the start of negotiations in 2017 on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.

The resolution has been put forward by Austria, Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, and is supported by a large majority of states that participated in the UN Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament in 2016.

Under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the UK is legally obliged “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament”. The Secretary of State for Defence Michael Fallon MP has said, “We share the vision of a world that is without nuclear weapons, achieved through multilateral disarmament”.

We were therefore alarmed and disappointed to hear that on Friday 14 October at the UN General Assembly the UK disarmament ambassador delivered a statement reiterating that the UK position remains to oppose negotiations on a nuclear weapons ban treaty, placing our country within the minority of states that reject the historic opportunity presented by this initiative.

Ambassador Rowland said in a statement that rather than negotiating a prohibition treaty, nations should abide by the principle of “do no harm”. But the UK and other nuclear armed states continue to threaten catastrophic worldwide harm to people and the environment through their continued deployment of nuclear weapons which creates an existential risk of accidental, unintended or deliberate use.

Far from being a leader on multilateral disarmament, the UK government is choosing to retain its nuclear arsenal and upgrade associated systems, as well as currently refusing to support new multilateral negotiations towards a global ban treaty. The UK is rapidly losing its claim to credibility on nonproliferation and disarmament: the government must re-evaluate whether it will support the UN ban process or end up on the wrong side of history.

The existence of nuclear weapons poses a dangerous threat to global security; any intended or unintended detonation will have catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences. The international community has already outlawed other inherently inhumane and indiscriminate weapons, from chemical and biological weapons to anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. A ban on nuclear weapons is long overdue – and the UK must be part of that process. We expect and urge the Government to reverse its position before voting begins on 26 October 2016.

Signed by Rebecca Sharkey,
UK Coordinator, ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons)

On behalf of the following ICAN UK partner organisations:

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Article 36
British Pugwash
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)
Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CCND)
Greenpeace UK
Hastings Against War
Medact
Movement for the Abolition of War
Nuclear Free Local Authorities
Nuclear Information Service
Nuclear Morality Flowchart Project
Pax Christi British Section
Quaker Peace & Social Witness
Scientists for Global Responsibility
Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (SCND)
Strategic Concept for Removal of Arms and Proliferation (SCRAP)
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom UK