Costly nukes ‘no protection’ against biggest threats to UK

Nick Benson

“Cosdy” nuclear weapons are “useless and irrelevant” against the two major global crises we currently face and therefore the world’s “normal” needs to be nuclear-weapons-free, an international Catholic peace movement has said.

Pax Christi UK has insisted that “now is the time to free ourselves from the moral and economic burden of nuclear weapons”, which have no part to play in the two major catastrophes facing the globe – the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change.

The call comes as the Commons Public Accounts Committee accused the Ministry of Defence (MoD) of an “unacceptable” failure to learn from past errors after a series of “avoidable mistakes” resulted in a huge increase in costs to the taxpayer.

The committee said a series of key projects to upgrade the infrastructure which supports Britain’s Trident nuclear deterrent were running years behind schedule and more than £1 billion over budget.

The MoD told the committee that it “immensly regrets” the money lost but warned that costs could continue to increase.

A report by the National Audit Office (NAO) found the three programmes to upgrade ageing facilities in the Defence Nuclear Enterprise – originally put at £2.5 billion – were facing cost overruns of £1.35 billion with delays between 1.7 and 6.3 years.

Theresa Alessandro, director of Pax Christi UK, said the new report shows that “British nuclear weapons are proving to be even more costly than expected at a time when public money is under unprecedented pressure”.

In addition, such highly-expensive and deadly weapons are pointless in the battle against the two biggest threats the world is currently facing.

“We are experiencing first-hand a crisis for which nuclear weapons are useless and irrelevant. We know they have no positive part to play in slowing down climate change either,” Ms Alessandro told The Catholic Universe.

“Now is the time to feel ourselves from the moral and economic burden of nuclear weapons.”

She recalled how even before the pandemic, the Archbishop of Liverpool, Malcolm McMahon, president of the British section of Pax Christi, called on the Government “to sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and be part of a future built on just international relationships and the common good of all human- ity.”

Acknowledging that there may be some concern over potential job losses, Ms Alessandro pointed out how the current crisis has proven that “industry can diversify and workers can use their skills for the common good instead”.

“For Pax Christi, the ‘new normal’ is a world without nuclear weapons,” she added.

In its report concerning the MoD, the Commons Public Accounts Com- mittee said: “It is unacceptable that the department in other areas has re- peated past mistakes, and has failed to learn lessons from elsewhere.”

“The department cannot explain why its leadership has not ensured that it learned from these experiences.”

Catholic MP and committee chair- woman Meg Hillier said: “To utterly fail to learn from mistakes over decades, to spectacularly repeat the same mistakes at huge cost to the taxpayer – and at huge cost to confidence in our defence capabilities – is completely unacceptable.”

The three projects named in the NAO report are: Project Mensa, which was to construct a new nuclear warhead assembly in Burghfield; the build- ing of a new core production capability at the Rolls Royce site at Raynesway to produce nuclear reactor core de- signs; and the primary build facility at the BAE Systems shipyard at Bar- row-in-Furness where the new Dreadnought submarines to carry the Trident nuclear missiles will be built.

The NAO said the MoD was con- tinuing to repeat mistakes made in the last cycle of investment in the nu- clear enterprise in the 1980s and 1990s while failing to learn from experiences in the civil sector or from overseas.

Pax Christi’s call came as peace campaigners criticised the decision to transport nuclear warheads from the south of England to Scotland dur- ing the pandemic.

A convoy carrying the weapons is understood to have left the Atomic Weapons Establishment site at Burgh- field, Berkshire, on 13th May and ar- rived at the storage facility at the Royal Armaments Depot Coulport in Argyll and Bute that evening.

Nukewatch UK claims the convoy would have involved at least 50 person- nel, including a crew change, and said it travelled along the M6 and on the M8 through Glasgow city centre.

Jane Tallents of Nukewatch UK said: “We never think this is essential travel and certainly at the moment there is no justification for putting us at further risk of potentially overwhelming the NHS if there was an accident.”

She also voiced fears over the move- ment of workers who could potentially be carrying coronavirus.

She added: “It is never right to pos- sess and deploy nuclear weapons and transport them on public roads. Doing it now is completely irresponsible.”

UK criticised for denying migrants essential aid

Refugee Service UK, said: “Given the large disparity in death rates for dif- ferent ethnic groups, it is critical that we do all within our power to remove obstacles we know make a difference.

That is why the Jesuit Refugee Service UK and other organisations are call- ing on the government to grant a pe- riod of leave to remain for all with insecure immigration status and to end its use of No Access to Public Funds policies denying migrants ac- cess to services and welfare.”

JRS UK was one of the groups which asked Boris Johnson to grant all without this security a period of leave to remain, for their safety and that of the wider public.

The High Court recently ruled that the government’s policy of denying families access to the welfare safety net, which increases the risk of des- titution and risks public health by forcing people into overcrowded ac- commodation and onto the streets, was unlawful.

“There is a huge amount we don’t know about why some ethnic groups are more severely affected than oth- ers,” said Ms Teather. “Leaving so many people denied access to essen- tial services and support when they are the very group most likely to be impacted by the virus is an act of negligence.”

Don’t trust in Bond... trust in God instead

Ireland’s own James Bond has urged fans to “trust God” and hope and pray that these dark times will pass.

In a message to those who are struggling with lockdowns in place to ease the spread of Covid-19, Pierce Brosnan suggested keeping in touch with loved ones, staying active, both in mind and spirit, and urging people to trust God.

“If you have friends, stay in contact with them, reach out to people. If you have families, stay close to them, put your prayers in your heart and you have a God in your heart, trust that God.”

“From being brought up an Irish Catholic, where I was brought up to put my trust in God, has been the importance of expressing oneself, whether it be through singing, dancing or writing. It is ‘essential’ that those who feel left behind in their homes reach out to others through the internet and via video calls, as ‘this has become a major part of our lives’.”

Brosnan said society must support scientists and those who are working to find a vaccine and that this crisis should be used as a “time to reset”.

“I think we are caught in the crosshairs of climate change and somehow our own ineptitude at dealing with the science we have of these viruses and I think we just have to weather the storm here,” he said. “We are in a grey area and that is a consist- ent thump of anxiety for us all each day and it’s going to be dealing with those anxieties.”

And he said that agitated by fake news, he added: “It’s very hard to pre- dict what will happen here except just you have to take each day as it comes, be in the present and hope and pray.”

Pointing out that Brosnan and his wife, Keely Shaye Smith, had recently celebrated 20 years together and will be celebrating their 19th wedding an- niversary in August, Brosnan asked whether there is a secret behind having one of “the most solid, happy mar- riages in Hollywood, if show busi- ness.”

In response, Brosnan revealed that the secret is “constant work and just supporting and loving each other”. “We have been blessed with a good friendship for life and we enjoy to do things together and others company and share the same interests and passions,” he continued.

“We have two beautiful children and Keely has been the most magnificent mother to her stepchildren and has managed to keep everyone on track one way or the other.

“So yes, it’s always solving problems because there’s always going to be problems so you have to know how to solve those problems and get on with it.”