

Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons



On 22 January 2021 the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force. This workshop introduces key facts about nuclear weapons, some of the arguments surrounding nuclear weapons, the role of the treaty and the voice of the Catholic Church.

Activity one– What are nuclear weapons?

This activity introduces some key facts about nuclear weapons so that students can put the rest of the session into a context.

Give the young people the key questions. Ask them to use either their prior knowledge or a guess to come up with an answer. Depending on how you are able to meet with the young people, you might want to put each question on one sheet for students to answer together, give students individual sheets, use an online chat function or use a document sharing tool.

Go through the answers and discuss if there was anything surprising -or anything else they wanted to know. If they do have questions, some of the resources given below may be able to help. Researching this could be set as an independent or group task.

Activity two– Opinions

The young people are given a range of opinions on nuclear weapons and should decide where they go on the opinion spectrum. Ask them to explore the opinions further: why people may think that, and if they agree. Then get the young people to decide where they would be on the line and why.

Activity three– The Treaty

This activity introduces the young people to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Read the short text with them and discuss the questions. You may want to do this in small groups first and this may also form the basis of a written activity. The text is available on a separate sheet below. If there are any further questions about the treaty the links below may be useful.

Activity four– The Catholic Church

The Vatican was one of the first states to sign and ratify the treaty and this activity explores some of the teachings of the Church and how they might be relevant.

The first part of the activity uses a passage from *Fratelli Tutti*, in which the Pope questions whether nuclear weapons can really be an answer to issues in the world today. The language in the text is quite difficult and so the questions are aimed at helping young people to understand the text and give their views. Depending on your group, you may want to skip this first part of the activity if you deem it

inappropriate for them.

The second part of this activity looks at two bible verses that talk about peace. The definitions are given for some of the words in the first verse. The young people are encouraged to reflect on what the verses are saying and what that might mean in relation to nuclear weapons. This activity could be done as a discussion, or as a reflection. You may want to give the young people the texts to look at in silence, or with quiet music in the background, and then discuss what stands out for them from either the text or from the questions given. All the texts are on a separate sheet below.

Activity five– Over to you...

This activity encourages the young people to think about what they have learnt and how they might take it further. The questions on the slide are to guide discussion or give ideas, but feel free to be as creative as you wish! Encourage the young people to think about what they could do on a personal level, in their community and on a societal level. They may also want to look at some of the links below.

Links and resources

There are lots of great resources and organisations out there to help you explore the issues around nuclear weapons and the nuclear weapons ban.

- The Pax Christi website has a dedicated campaign page where you can find more information on the ban and other resources: www.paxchristi.org.uk/nuclear-ban-treaty-2021/
- For more information about the treaty and nuclear weapons, ICAN's website has lots of information and resources: www.icanw.org
- There is also a range of information and resources on the website of the UK branch of ICAN, including other activities to help young people explore the issue: uk.icanw.org
- CND also has a range of campaigns and information on nuclear issues (<https://cnduk.org>) and their Peace Education page has some fantastic resources for young people and schools: <https://cnduk.org/education/>
- Christian CND also has information and resources, including resources with a faith element: <https://christiancnd.org.uk>
- Quaker Peace Education have also produced a lesson looking at the nuclear weapons ban treaty and how other weapons have also been banned, available on TES: <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/how-are-weapons-banned-from-war-a-global-citizenship-project-inspired-by-the-nuclear-weapon-ban-12471005>

If you would like any more information or guidance, or would like someone from our team to run a session, please don't hesitate to get in touch at education@paxchristi.org.uk

What is a nuclear bomb?	
Why are nuclear weapons different from most other weapons?	
How many nuclear weapons are there in the world?	
How many countries have nuclear weapons?	
How many nuclear weapons does the UK have?	
Have any nuclear bombs been dropped in war?	
How many people were killed as a result?	
How many times more powerful are the weapons the UK has today compared to the one dropped on Hiroshima?	

<p>What is a nuclear bomb?</p>	<p>A nuclear bomb is a weapon that uses the energy from atoms (either by splitting them or joining the particles within them) to cause an explosion.</p>
<p>Why are nuclear weapons different from most other weapons?</p>	<p>They are weapons of mass destruction. Just one bomb is enough to destroy a very wide area, killing thousands of people, whether they are fighting or not, and damaging the environment so that food and water supplies are poisoned. Nuclear radiation goes on killing people by causing illnesses for the rest of their lives, and causes future generations to be born with serious health problems.</p>
<p>How many nuclear weapons are there in the world?</p>	<p>Currently there are approximately 13,865 nuclear weapons in the world.</p>
<p>How many countries have nuclear weapons?</p>	<p>Nine. The UK, the USA, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel</p>
<p>How many nuclear weapons does the UK have?</p>	<p>215</p>
<p>Have any nuclear bombs been dropped in war?</p>	<p>Yes, two. One on Hiroshima and the other on Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945.</p>
<p>How many people were killed as a result?</p>	<p>140,000 people were killed in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki by the end of 1945, due to the impact and effects of the bombs.</p>
<p>How many times more powerful are the weapons the UK has today compared to the one dropped on Hiroshima?</p>	<p>The nuclear warheads Britain has today are eight times more powerful than that dropped on Hiroshima.</p>

The Treaty

On 22 January 2021 the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force.

This means over 50 countries have agreed that they won't possess, develop, test, use or encourage other countries to use nuclear weapons. They also agree to help victims of nuclear weapon usage and testing and to clean up the environmental impacts of nuclear weapons.

However, not all countries have signed the treaty, including the nine countries with nuclear weapons.

Campaigners say that the law will put pressure on the countries which haven't banned them, meaning they are less and less likely to produce and use them. Companies will also be less likely to want to be involved in producing and financing the weapons. For campaigners, it is an important step in creating a world free from nuclear weapons.

The Catholic Church

The Vatican was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the treaty.

In his letter to the Church, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis says:

“if we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security ... in the twenty-first century... for example, terrorism, ... conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty...doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges.

These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons... We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples.”

Fratelli Tutti, #262

Ratify: to formally approve/ make official

The Catholic Church

“He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.”

Isaiah 2:4

Arbitrate: resolve a disagreement

Ploughshare/ pruning hook: these are tools used in farming and for growing things

“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.”

Matthew 5:9