

Shunning Nuclear Weapons: Averting a Global Catastrophe

A Global Appeal by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

By Peter Maurer, ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross appeals to all States, global leaders and citizens to act on the increasing risk of the use of nuclear weapons. Whether used in a specific region or among major powers, the use of nuclear weapons would cause a catastrophic and irreparable humanitarian disaster.

If a nuclear conflict happened today, there is no international plan or capacity to respond adequately to even a limited use of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the only sound course of action is prevention. We appeal for urgent efforts to ensure that nuclear weapons are never again used.

Avoiding a global nuclear catastrophe requires urgent action by all the world's governments:

- **States possessing nuclear weapons** and their allies must urgently take measures to reduce and eventually eliminate the risk of nuclear weapon use. All other members of the international community have a stake in ensuring they do so;

- **States Parties to the Treaty** on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) must use the 2020 Review Conference, and its April 2018 Preparatory Committee in Geneva, to change course, away from threats of use and modernization of nuclear arsenals and towards full implementation of commitments they made in 2010 and previously to nuclear arms reductions, risk reduction and other effective nuclear disarmament measures; and

- **States should take the necessary steps** to adhere to the 1972 NPT, the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and other nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation treaties to which they are not yet party and fully implement their provisions.

The ICRC makes this Appeal against the backdrop of a world in which the risk of use of nuclear weapons seems to be increasing. With previous restraints steadily falling away, and threats of use of nuclear weapons entering mainstream politics, we see a shift from a focus on non-use and elimination to making the use of nuclear weapons possible or more likely:

- **With military incidents** involving nuclear States and their allies occurring with disturbing frequency, the danger of use of nuclear weapons may be greater today than during the cold war.

- **The UN Secretary General** recently warned the Security Council that “The cold war is back... but

with a difference. The mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the risks of escalation that existed in the past no longer seem to be present.”

- **States possessing nuclear weapons** have plans for adapting nuclear weapons in ways that will make them able to be used in a wider variety of contexts. In parallel, their command and control systems have become more vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

To be clear, the ICRC understands that all States and, in particular those engaged in conflicts in volatile areas of the world, face complex security challenges, including risks to their security and that of their allies. Regional conflicts are now intertwined with global rivalries. A multitude of protracted conflicts continue with no political solutions in sight. Yet the introduction of nuclear weapons and threats of their use only renders such conflicts more dangerous and increases the risk of a global conflagration in which much of humanity will suffer irreparably. Indeed, in some cases, the existence of nuclear weapons and the “security” benefits attributed to them are root causes of the tensions themselves.

We also recognize that in the last two decades, significant steps have been taken to reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons from Cold War levels. Yet reductions alone do not reduce the risk of their use in light of the facts and dangers mentioned above. Concerted steps towards reducing nuclear risks are therefore urgently needed. Nuclear weapon States and those allied to them bear particular responsibility. Such measures are well known and include:

- Unequivocal commitments never to use nuclear weapons first [only China, India and North Korea have done so];

- Removal of nuclear weapons from “hair trigger” alert status;

- Pre-notification of military exercises that may involve the launch of missiles or other vehicles associated with nuclear weapons;

- Re-establishment of joint early-warning centers to clarify in real-time unexpected and potentially destabilizing events; and

- Steps to progressively reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security policies.

This Appeal is rooted in what the ICRC knows through its own experience in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 73 years ago and that of Japanese Red Cross

hospitals which, even today, continue to provide treatment for many thousands of survivors of the US atomic bombings. From this experience, and from what has been learned through engagement with environmental experts, the United Nations and other organizations, it is clear that:

- **The catastrophic consequences** of nuclear weapons use cannot be limited in time and space, and that more victims will die in the months and years following their use than at the moment of the blast through radiation poisoning, cancers and other diseases;

- **There is still today** no international capacity or plan for humanitarian assistance to respond adequately to the use of nuclear weapons; and

- **Even the use of just a hundred nuclear weapons**, which represents a fraction of existing arsenals, against urban targets could lead to [mass smoke from vast firestorms causing] a cooling of global temperatures, shortening of growing seasons, food shortages in large parts of the world, and the deaths of over a billion people.

This Appeal by the ICRC also reflects the urgent concerns of the entire International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including 191 National Societies and millions of volunteers around the world. Just last November, the Movement expressed its deep alarm at the increasing risk that nuclear weapons may be used and stressed “that any risk of use of nuclear weapons is unacceptable given their catastrophic consequences.” Together we adopted an ambitious four-year Action Plan to ensure nuclear weapons are never again used and are eliminated.

Three years ago in my statement on nuclear weapons to the Geneva diplomatic corps ahead of the 2015 Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference, I concluded: “We know now more than ever before that the risks are too high, the dangers too real. It is time for States, and all those in a position to influence them, to act with urgency and determination to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end.”

Too often, the international community has been unable to prevent foreseeable crises. This time it is imperative that we prevent impending nuclear catastrophe. Seldom has collective action to reduce nuclear weapon risks and move towards their elimination been more urgent. —April 23, 2018

World's Biggest Submarine Base Targeted by Plowshares Action

Adapted from *The Nuclear Resister*

Seven Catholic plowshares activists entered Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in St. Mary's, Georgia on April 4th, 2018. They said in a statement that went “to make real the prophet Isaiah's command to ‘beat swords into plowshares.’” Once on the base, the activists used crime scene tape, hammers and hung banners reading: “The ultimate logic of racism is genocide —Dr. Martin Luther King,” and “Nuclear weapons: illegal/ immoral.”

The seven acted on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who devoted his life to addressing what he called the “triple evils of militarism, racism and materialism.” Another of their banners reworked Dr. King's “ultimate logic” declaration, applying it to nuclear weapons saying “The Ultimate Logic of Trident is Omnicide.”

Kings Bay Naval base is the Navy's Atlantic Ocean Trident submarine port. In southeastern Georgia, 38 miles from Jacksonville, Florida, Kings Bay is the largest nuclear submarine base in the world. The site maintains six giant Trident long-range, nuclear missile submarines (each two football fields long), and two guided missile subs.

The group also carried a written indictment of the nuclear weapons base accusing the US government with crimes against peace.

Carrying hammers and baby bottles of their own
Nukewatch Quarterly - 2

blood, the seven attempted to symbolically convert weapons of mass destruction. They hoped to call attention to the ways in which nuclear weapons kill every day by wasting scarce resources desperately needed to address hunger, disease, and homelessness.



The Kings Bay Plowshares participants from left: Clare Grady, Patrick O'Neill, Elizabeth McAlister, Fr. Steve Kelly SJ, Martha Hennessy, Mark Colville, and Carmen Trotta.

The action statement added that nuclear weapons kill before being detonated “through our mining, production, testing, storage, and dumping, primarily on Indigenous Native land.” The statement quoted Dr. King, who said in his Beyond Vietnam speech, “The greatest purveyor of violence in the

world today is my own government.”

The seven activists are Elizabeth McAlister, 78, of Jonah House, Baltimore; Fr. Steve Kelly SJ, 69, of the Bay Area, California; Martha Hennessy, 62, and Carmen Trotta, 55, both of the New York Catholic Worker; Clare Grady, 59, of the Ithaca Catholic Worker; Mark Colville, 55, of the New Haven, Conn. Catholic Worker; and Patrick O'Neill, 61, of the Garner, North Carolina Catholic Worker.

The seven were charged in federal court with felony Conspiracy, Destruction of Property on a Naval Station, Depredation of Government Property, and Trespass. The Kings Bay protest is the latest in the long series of 100 previous Plowshares actions. The Plowshares disarmament movement began in 1980 with “The Plowshares Eight” who entered a General Electric nuclear warhead factory in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Patrick O'Neill, Carmen Trotta and Martha Hennessy were released on bond to house arrest on May 24, 2018. The four others can be sent *only* plain, white pre-stamped postcards, using *only* blue or black ink, at: Clare Grady #015632; Elizabeth McAlister #015633; Stephen Kelly #015634; Mark Colville #015635. C/O at the Glynn County Detention Center, 100 Sulphur Springs Road, Brunswick, GA 31520.

—For updates see: <kingsbayplowshares7.org> or <nukeresister.org>