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UN Working Group Calls for Negotiations in Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons Treaty Ban

By Kelly Lundeen

In a historic move, the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on nuclear disarmament recommended that the General Assembly mandate negotiations on a nuclear weapons ban treaty. After 127 states committed to the Humanitarian Pledge adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 15, 2015, the OEWG began meeting and declared the recommendation on August 19, 2016. The ban would be a legally-binding international law imposing "prohibitions against possession, use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer, as well as measures for elimination." While no one expects the US and other nuclear-armed states to ratify the treaty, the law would increase critical international pressure and severely stigmatize any continued possession or threatened use of the weapons.

Many of the nations that took part in the meetings that led to the recommendation argue that there is a legal gap in international law to reach total elimination of nuclear weapons. While one of the fundamental purposes of the United Nations is nuclear disarmament, little progress has been made by means of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, or the independent treaties between the US and Russia. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), with partner organizations in 98 countries, has led the civilian push for a treaty ban. The groups believe that endless failure on disarmament is not an option. The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War said the goal of a ban is "more effective measures to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons."

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NUKEWATCH
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News & Information on Nuclear Weapons, Power, Waste & Nonviolent Resistance

Federal Nuclear Waste Site Search Team Lampooned at Minnesota Hearing

Energy Department's "Consent-Based" Plan Slammed

By Kelly Lundeen

MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota—On July 21, the Department of Energy (DOE) held the last of eight hearings it dubbed "Consent-Based Siting" sessions regarding its plans for disposing of the nation's high-level radioactive waste from commercial reactors. For over 60 years, the roughly 60,000 tons of this waste has been accumulating at reactor sites, and the DOE is again publicly collecting input on how to choose a disposal site. Using its so-called "consent-based" initiative, the DOE is compiling comments regarding a framework for the process of finding a community that would accept decades of dangerous shipments and bury or store the waste. The DOE received less than a warm welcome at the Minneapolis Hilton.

Nukewatch staff member Kelly Lundeen plays the role of Potential Waste Host Community during the "Radioactive Green Eggs and Ham" action at the July DOE hearing in Minneapolis.

Nukewatch attended, along with supporters and allies that politely lambasted the DOE staff and its paid participants. Anti-nuclear activists traveled from as far away as Texas (Sustainable Economic and Energy Development Coalition), Illinois (Nuclear Energy Info. Service), Delaware (Green Delaware), and Nevada (NV Nuclear Waste Task Force), as well as Minnesota (North American Water Office, Women Against Military Madness, Legalectric, Friends of Coldwater).

Nuclear waste specialist Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear called the initiative "an elaborate fishing expedition conducted to test the strength of public opposition."

Mary Olson, from Nuclear Information & Resource Service was critical of the DOE's process too, and wrote Nukewatch in an email: "Individuals in the Department of Energy, who were part of the short-lived Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, believe that during the commission's term there were 'volunteer' sites for waste storage that came forward (Waste Control Specialists in Texas is one), and they decided to engage in what they believe is a consent-based waste storage siting process now, even though a change in federal law will be required to actually move the waste. The meetings were held to provide a public-participation component to this lawless act."

The DOE's meetings have been condemned for many reasons, among them:

• **Bailing out the nuclear industry**—Under the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the DOE took responsibility for finding a storage site, and it committed to taking ownership of the waste as soon as it left the site of the utilities producing it. The act gave nuclear utilities free reign to produce radioactive waste for decades without having to worry about the cost of disposal or accidents.

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