

# Universities Across the United States Profit from Developing Nuclear Weapons

By Beatrice Fihn

Americans like a good comeback story, but the recent revitalization of the nuclear arms race is not one to be cheered. President Trump plans to charge the US taxpayer nearly \$100,000-a-minute to expand the nation's nuclear weapons capabilities.

Other nuclear-armed countries are doing the same.

A new generation of nuclear weapons requires a new generation of workers to develop and maintain these weapons of mass destruction. The National Nuclear Security Administration reported to Congress that 40 percent of its workforce will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

The US government and its contractors have turned to the nation's universities to provide this human capital. A new report documents formal ties between nearly 50 college campuses and the nuclear weapons complex.

The extent to which universities have joined this endeavor is surprising. Supporting weapons of mass destruction does not show up in any university mission statements. In fact, it's often the opposite: universities like to talk about bringing the benefits of knowledge to a global community.

The dangers posed by nuclear weapons are clear. Yet universities still choose to support them.

Students and faculty now face a choice. They can become the next generation of weapons scientists. Or they can refuse to be complicit in this scheme, denying research partnerships or internships at nuclear weapons labs.

Currently, universities across the country receive millions and in some cases billions of dollars to



support nuclear weapons development. Universities directly manage nuclear weapons labs, form institutional agreements with these labs and related production sites, pursue research partnerships with nuclear weapons scientists, and provide targeted workforce development for these facilities.

Many of the universities with more extensive connections to nuclear weapons are household names: the University of California, Texas A&M University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of New Mexico. Others, such as local technical and vocational schools, are less well-known.

Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction, just like chemical and biological weapons. They carry devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences that do not stop at national borders.

## The Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor is Here

By the Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor

Tracking the progress of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the *Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor*,\* published by Norwegian People's Aid, has identified 31 mostly European states—including Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, and Spain—as “nuclear-weapon-complicit states.” These are states that do not themselves possess nuclear weapons but have outsourced their nuclear postures to one or more nuclear-armed allies through arrangements of extended nuclear [collaboration], or “nuclear umbrellas.” They endorse or acquiesce in the continued possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons on their behalf.

It is not only the nine nuclear-armed states that stand between the international community and its long-standing goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. So do the 31 nuclear-weapon-complicit states. Their role

in assisting, encouraging, and inducing continued retention of nuclear weapons had not been given much attention prior to the adoption of the Ban Treaty by the UN in 2017, says the editor of the *Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor*, Grethe Lauglo Østern of NPA.

The nine nuclear-armed states and the 31 nuclear-weapon-complicit states do not support the TPNW, and some of them actively oppose it. However, the great majority of the world's states stand behind the Treaty. *Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor* counts a total of 135 countries as TPNW supporters.

As of November 2019, 34 countries are full “States Parties” to the TPNW, while another 48 have signed it, but not yet ratified. In addition, 55 countries have voted in favor of the Treaty in the UN, but not yet taken steps to adhere to it, says Østern. \*See: <file:///C:/Users/Nukewatch/Downloads/Nuclear\_Weapons\_Ban\_Monitor\_2019.pdf>

## Grassroots Propelling the Nuclear Ban Treaty

“The US should work with the other nuclear armed countries to eliminate all nuclear weapons from all countries, in line with the new treaty.” On July 7, 2017, 122 countries voted for the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations (TPNW).

If you agree, your opinion aligns with 49% of US adults polled by YouGov\* on behalf of www.nuclearban.us, a treaty compliance campaign. Likewise, 30% of people identifying as Republican, 52% of women, 56% of Hispanics, and 53% of those over 55 years believe that the US should support the 2017 TPNW.

While it may be surprising to realize there are so many in the United States that agree, this 49% is part of the world majority. The recently released 2019 *Nuclear Ban Monitor* [banmonitor.org] finds 135 countries already following the word of the treaty even though turning that into official policy is a work in progress. Currently, there are 79 signatories, meaning the nations refuse to do anything contradictory to the treaty's object and purpose. There are 32 countries (formally called “States Parties”) that have ratified the ban, meaning they are legally bound by its requirements. With these numbers steadily climbing, the TPNW is expected to enter into force

soon, when 50 States have ratified which will make nuclear weapons illegal under international law.

In the United States, while the federal administrations of Obama and Trump have actively opposed the ban, the TPNW has advanced through several major campaigns including Don't Bank on the Bomb, Back from the Brink and *Warheads to Windmills: How to pay for a Green New Deal* (by Timmon Wallis <NuclearBan.us>). Grassroots pressure is taking money away from the bomb by urging financial institutions to divest. Don't Bank on the Bomb released its 2019 report *Beyond the Bomb* on October 17, documenting 77 financial institutions that have investments in nuclear weapons producers. This number has more than doubled since 2014 when the annual report first appeared. Thirty-six of the 77 institutions have a comprehensive policy preventing any involvement in nuclear weapon producing companies, denying them access to over \$1,700 billion in funds.

Back from the Brink is a campaign offering organizations and institutions a way to express support for the TPNW through their Call to Prevent Nuclear War resolution. To date endorsements have come from four state government bodies, including the California and Oregon state legislatures, and the

Thousands still suffer from the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thousands more suffer from the effects of nuclear weapons testing in the 20th century, including in the US.

One Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study estimated that radioactive fallout from nuclear tests would kill an additional 11,000 Americans due to an increase in fatal cancers. The United States has paid more than \$2.3 billion in compensation to individuals affected by nuclear test fallout. Those most affected by tests around the world have been the already marginalized: indigenous and colonized peoples, women and children.

Some see value in the nuclear weapons complex because it supplies thousands of jobs. These boosters fail to acknowledge the studies that demonstrate how defense spending produces fewer jobs per dollar than investment in other areas, like education, health care or infrastructure. The business of nuclear weapons does not provide jobs; it takes them away.

Our choice today is between a future without nuclear weapons or no future at all. Seventy-nine nations (and counting) have signed the 2017 United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; American states and cities are voting to urge the US to join them. Universities that support nuclear weapons make the wrong choice and their communities should refuse to be complicit.

Students, faculty, alumni, and community members—who often fund these schools through their tax dollars—can also take concrete action to help their universities join the right side of history.

They can push for transparency around any ties to the nuclear weapons complex, install ethical review processes for basic or dual-purpose research funded by the complex, and prohibit classified research. They can ask University administrations to stop direct management of nuclear weapons production sites and dissolve research contracts solely related to nuclear weapons production.

University communities and administrations together can lobby the federal government to flip its funding priorities, so that nonproliferation and disarmament verification research receive more funding than weapons activities.

A society can—and should—actively debate the extent to which universities are to serve explicitly national interests. But there should be no debate when it comes to supporting weapons of mass destruction. American academia must stop enabling mass murder.

—Beatrice Fihn is the Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize-winners, and wrote this piece for Newsweek, Nov. 13, 2019.

Maine state senate and New Jersey state assembly, 39 municipalities, such as Tucson, Arizona, Honolulu, Hawaii, Washington, DC, and most recently Portland, Oregon, and over 260 environmental, faith, peace, health and academic organizations like Hip Hop Caucus, Soka Gakkai International, the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center and 350.org.

Taking compliance with the Treaty Ban one step further is <nuclearban.us>, the organization that coordinated the previously-mentioned poll. The group promotes both the Treaty Ban and the Green New Deal by linking them through its Warheads to Windmills campaign. By becoming compliant with the Nuclear Ban Treaty, “the money saved can be redirected to green technologies for [facing] the climate crisis.”

While the governments and weapons manufacturers try to ignore the Ban Treaty, a clamor from below continues to grow. —Kelly Lundeen

\* All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov.com, a British internet-based research and data analytics firm. Total sample size was 1355 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between Sept. 20 and 23, 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all US adults (aged 18+).