



Nuclear weapons & human rights

Universal Periodic Review: 41st Session of the Human Rights Council

Questions and recommendations to the United Kingdom

Follow-up to the written submission¹ made to the UN Human Rights Council by:

Abolition 2000 UK, Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, Association of Swiss Lawyers for Nuclear Disarmament, Basel Peace Office, Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, Christian CND, CND Cymru (Wales), International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, International Forum for Understanding, Legacy of the Atomic Bomb/Recognition for Atomic Test Survivors (LABRATS), Nuclear Free Local Authorities, Pax Christi Scotland, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Sheffield Creative Action for Peace, Uniting for Peace, Westminster West Rotary Club Peace Committee, Youth Fusion, World Future Council and 80,000 Voices.

Introduction

In January 2022, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists set the Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds to Midnight indicating the severe existential risk to humanity from the dual threats of climate change and nuclear weapons. Since then, things have only gotten worse. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has elevated the risk of nuclear war, and recent figures from the International Energy Agency indicate that carbon emissions continue to climb reaching a colossal 36.3 gigatonnes in 2021.

In 2018, the Human Rights Committee affirmed in General Comment 36 on the Right to Life that:

*The threat or use of weapons of mass destruction, **in particular nuclear weapons**, which are indiscriminate in effect and are of a nature to cause destruction of human life on a catastrophic scale, **is incompatible with respect for the right to life** and may amount to a crime under international law.*

States parties must take all necessary measures to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including measures to prevent their acquisition by non-state actors, to refrain from developing, producing, testing, acquiring, stockpiling, selling, transferring and using them, to destroy existing stockpiles, and to take adequate measures of protection against accidental use, all in accordance with their international obligations.

They must also respect their international obligations to pursue in good faith negotiations in order to achieve the aim of nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control. (paragraph 66).

¹ *United Kingdom's nuclear weapons policies: Obligations under international human rights law including Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.* Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council during its Periodic Review of the United Kingdom. 41st Session of the HRC.

http://baselpeaceoffice.org/sites/default/files/imce/HumanRights/submission_to_the_human_rights_council_regarding_uk_nuclear_weapons_policies_and_practices_final_version_with_annex.pdf

United Kingdom nuclear weapons policies

The co-sponsoring organizations allege that the United Kingdom is in violation of their obligations under human rights law and other international law with respect to the following nuclear weapons policies and practices:

- Failure to provide adequate reparations for the impact of explosive nuclear tests undertaken by the United Kingdom in Australia, the Pacific and Nevada (USA);
- Production and deployment of nuclear weapons at considerable opportunity cost for economic and social needs;
- Threat to use nuclear weapons, along with plans and preparations for their use in armed conflict;
- Failure to implement obligations to dismantle and destroy nuclear weapons under their control;
- Failure to pursue negotiations in good faith on the global elimination of nuclear weapons under strict and effective international control.

The co-sponsoring organizations commend the UK for initial steps in the late 1990s to implement these obligations, but are alarmed at the lack of progress since then, and in recent steps in the wrong direction to expand the role of nuclear weapons and to modernize, increase and extend its nuclear forces.

QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Question:** *What is the United Kingdom doing to reduce the risks of nuclear war by accident, crisis escalation or intent?*
Recommendation: *That the United Kingdom adopt a national policy never to use nuclear weapons first, and call on all other nuclear-armed states to adopt a similar policy.*
- **Question:** *What is the United Kingdom doing to end the production and modernization of nuclear weapons?*
Recommendation: *The United Kingdom should cancel the Trident nuclear weapons renewal program, reinvest the budget allocated for this program to instead support public health and transition to a green economy, and schedule a UN Security Council special session on implementation of UN Charter Article 26 to encourage other nuclear armed states to take similar actions.*
- **Question:** *What is the United Kingdom doing to phase out the role of nuclear weapons in order to fulfil its disarmament obligations?*
Recommendation: *The United Kingdom should call on the nuclear weapon states and all other States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to commence multilateral negotiations to achieve the global prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons no later than 2045, the 75th anniversary of the NPT and the 100th anniversary of the United Nations.*
- **Question:** *What is the United Kingdom doing to address the environmental and health impacts of its nuclear weapons testing program?*
Recommendation: *The UK should undertake a comprehensive health study of the communities (including descendants) of the veterans and indigenous peoples in the UK nuclear testing environments, and establish a more comprehensive and inclusive compensation program for all those affected by the UK Nuclear tests, modelled on the approach of the US Radiation Exposure Compensation Act*

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