

Hear, Heed, Heal

The Nobel Peace Prize was just awarded to ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, for its work over the last 10 years that culminated in the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, in July, 2017.

Why should we take notice of this, here in the US, which invented the Atomic Bomb, and is the only nation ever to have used them against human beings, and did not sign this treaty?

There is something very important for us to learn here. 122 members of The United Nations, speaking now with one voice, are telling it like it is. We have created a serious problem: the 15,000 nuclear weapons in our world, and the existential threat they pose to life on earth. We are being called out, because we have ignored the problem for 70 years. Yes, it's the same message articulated in the first action taken by the UN.

On January 24, 1946, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus its very first resolution, Resolution 1(I): which established a commission of the UN Security Council to ensure:

1. the 'control of atomic energy to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes,' and
2. 'the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.'

This issue has been debated, but not resolved, as long as nuclear weapons have existed, because they threaten every person, and indeed all life, on earth. They are not military tools at all, but indiscriminate destroyers of life, which level cities, and kill, maim, poison, burn, and mutilate people, animals, and plants alike. There is no humanitarian justification for their use, by anyone, ever. Finally, we have a new definition, that clearly states how severe the danger really is:

Nuclear weapons, just as chemical and biological weapons, and land mines, are universal threats to public health the world over; as such, they must be banned, as all those other weapons of mass destruction are banned, by international treaties. This correlation is spelled out in the new treaty, and that is why it was so readily endorsed by 122 nations. Those nations, from every continent and every culture, are plainly telling us, the nuclear armed minority of nations, just how we are seen by the rest of the world, as selfish bullies who don't care about the rest of the world's people. Do we hear them?

Will we heed their warning? The evidence for this judgement is becoming more obvious all the time. The steady reduction of nuclear arsenals that had begun with the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s has slowed to a crawl, and finally stopped. Our own share of them is

about 6500, of which at least 1500 are on hair-trigger alert status, and Russia has about the same amount. The remaining thousand or so nuclear weapons are held by China, France, UK, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. The signatories of the UN treaty are the neighbors of all these countries, who are now speaking out with one voice. They are justifiably alarmed that we and Russia are both now upgrading our arsenals, making existing weapons more powerful, and designing new warheads and delivery systems. Both Russia and the US are dedicating increased budgets to these weapons systems, and both are enhancing the cyber-attack capabilities that make the whole enterprise even more precarious. Meanwhile the chances of accidental detonations, acquisition of weapons by terrorists, and impulsive military actions by emotionally unstable leaders, are all becoming more likely every day. Is it any wonder those 122 nations are frightened? We must pay attention to their warning. We can no longer pretend that the international security situation is under control. The clock is surely ticking, and it is past time we noticed.

So what can we do? We can help our leaders to heal the wounds that our 70 year obsession with threatening the world with nuclear disaster has caused. We can start by declaring that the US will never launch a first strike with nuclear weapons, and then take them all off hair-trigger status. We can stop funding new nuclear weapons systems. We can dismantle our warheads, and repurpose all the parts. We can finally clean up the weapons facilities, like Hanford and Oak Ridge, and redirect the weapons laboratories of Los Alamos, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore to work on the permanent solution to nuclear waste disposal. We can assist the other nuclear armed nations to do all of these things as well, thus fulfilling the pledge we made by signing the Non Proliferation Treaty of 1970. We can rejoin the community of nations, by finally renouncing nuclear weapons and all the terror they embody.

How do we start? We need to speak up, with the same voice as the 122 Treaty nations, and tell our senators, representatives, and other elected officials that we want to join those other nations in common cause, for the truly humanitarian work of finally ridding the world of the threat of nuclear catastrophe. There are many groups working together to bring about the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide. If you wish to join in this urgent work, check them out, and find your own place in this movement. Here are a few of the most active. Ploughshares Fund, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, American Friends Service Committee, Union of Concerned Scientists, and closer to home Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, and locally No More Bombs.

Submitted by Tracy W Powell, La Conner WA, January 2018

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