

Canadian Pugwash Group

Chair: Dr. Adele Buckley; Vice Chair: Prof. Walter Dorn; Treasurer: Prof. Erika Simpson;
Secretary: Prof. Sergei Plekhanov; Directors: Prof. Peter Meincke; Dr. Theodora Carroll; Mr. Steven Staples

December 22, 2006

Prime Minister Tony Blair
Parliament of the United Kingdom

And

Mr. Julian Evans, Acting High Commissioner
British High Commission for Canada

Dear Prime Minister Blair and High Commissioner Evans:

RE: Trident nuclear weapons

As members of Canadian Pugwash, we urge you to reconsider the proposed replacement of the Trident nuclear weapon system.

As you know, Pugwash takes its name from Pugwash, Nova Scotia, Canada, where a meeting of influential scientists inaugurated this organization in 1957 in response to the Russell Einstein Manifesto of 1955 against nuclear war. The purpose of the Pugwash Conferences is to bring together influential scholars and public figures, all of whom are concerned with reducing the danger of armed conflict and seek cooperative solutions for global problems. Canadian Pugwash, the Canadian representative of this now-international organization, has held strongly to this goal over the Cold War years, and to the present day. The Pugwash Conferences and its founder, Sir Joseph Rotblat, were recognized by joint award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995. Sir Joseph, since his withdrawal from participation in the Manhattan Project, lived in the U.K. and was a strong proponent for peace and disarmament.

At the 2000 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) meeting at the United Nations, which you chaired, the nuclear weapon states made an “unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals”. This undertaking was a restatement of the obligation of the signatories under Article VI of the NPT, and this re-commitment gave us hope that at last the illegality of nuclear war and nuclear threat was being recognized and upheld by the Nuclear Weapons States.

We applaud this undertaking, and were astonished to read in the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy report, London, 22 November 2006, that you have placed the question of replacement for Britain’s nuclear weapon system, Trident, on the agenda of Parliament. We hope that this will serve to initiate a broad debate in your country about the rapidly evolving nature of true national and global security, and the implications of threats to global peace posed by nuclear weapons. Civil society and its government must come to understand that nuclear weapons decrease true security.

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Clearly, in the ongoing war on terror, nuclear weapons have no application. On the contrary, the rise of terrorism makes the possession of nuclear weapons, and fissile materials, more of a threat than a deterrent. The security risk is not only to Britain but extends to the global community, threatened with another world war in response.

How does a Trident submarine contribute to ecological security or food security? How does it help Britain to meet the threat of global warming? What is the credibility of British talk about security against terrorism when weapons of mass destruction are coveted by its own nation, especially in the light of an international treaty obligation to disarm? The international civil community is waiting for the World Court's decision on the legitimacy under international law of the pre-emptive attack on Iraq. Choosing to increase Britain's nuclear fortification at this time could be seen to threaten further pre-emptive attacks and destruction of the poorer countries of the world.

We urge you to open this discussion to include a discernment of true security in the 21st century, for all of the people of the world. The majority of peoples in the developing world can be expected to try to gain nuclear weapons if Britain chooses them for its "security". We continue to hope that Britain will lead the way to total nuclear disarmament, and this time of decision about Trident replacement is an outstanding opportunity to show that leadership.

The choice of Britain today will have repercussions nationally and internationally for many years into the future. We urge you to avoid walking in paths you so strongly condemned in other members of the international community.

Sincerely

Adele Buckley

Dr. Adele Buckley
Chair, Canadian Pugwash Group

Rosalie Bertell

Dr. Rosalie Bertell
Member, Canadian Pugwash Group

CC: The Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada
The Honourable Douglas Roche, Past-Chair Canadian Pugwash
Dr. Robert Hinde, Chair, British Pugwash Group
Dr. Rebecca Johnson, Head, Acronym Institute
Canadian Pugwash Executive Committee