

IMPORTANT EDINBURGH NFLA JOINT SEMINAR HELD ON THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS ISSUE

On April 19th 2013 a joint seminar was held in Edinburgh City Chambers organised by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) Scotland Forum in association with Mayors for Peace, Abolition 2000 and Parliamentarians for Non-proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament (PNND).

The seminar considered the future development of the nuclear weapons issue in 2013 and was deliberately held prior to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Preparatory Conference in Geneva, taking place the following week. The seminar also coincided with the International Annual General Meeting of the Abolition 2000 Network.

The evening prior to the seminar a special event to close the Abolition 2000 Annual General Meeting was held in the Scottish Parliament. This was opened by the Co-Chairs of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Nuclear Weapons Patrick Harvey MSP and Bill Kidd MSP and the principal guest speaker was the former Mayor of Hiroshima Tadatashi Akiba. This event was very well attended with representatives from across Europe, North America, Asia and New Zealand.

The NFLA Scotland joint seminar was opened by the Lord Provost Donald Wilson. The Lord Provost noted that he was a strong and vocal supporter of the campaign for nuclear weapons disarmament and had been proud to open and host a recent Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bomb photographic exhibition, which had been held in Edinburgh Central Library.

The joint seminar included four high profile speakers who have been heavily involved in the international nuclear weapons issue over the past 2 decades. The seminar was chaired by the NFLA Scotland Convenor, Councillor Bill Butler of Glasgow City Council. Councillor Butler was delighted to introduce such important speakers and reiterated the strong cross-party nature of the NFLA and its continued committed policy to seek a nuclear free British and Irish Isles.

Keynote speaker was the former Mayor of Hiroshima and President of Mayors for Peace, Dr Tadatashi Akiba, who is now Chair of the influential group, the Middle Powers Initiative. In his speech Dr Akiba outlined the work of the Middle Powers Initiative in seeking productive dialogue through the institutions of the United Nations to speed up the disarmament process. He also noted the real and growing importance of local authorities and the hibakuska (A-bomb survivors) in this debate, which needs to be both nurtured and strongly encouraged.

The second speaker included Laurie Ross, Director of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone and Peacemaking Association. Laurie outlined how the peace movement encouraged local government and the main political parties to become more engaged in the nuclear weapons debate. This movement over time led to a wide consensus to ban nuclear weapons from New Zealand soil and legislate to become a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. Laurie also noted the continuing work in New Zealand to continue this policy and encourage its Government to be pro-active on the issue at United Nations Conferences on nuclear disarmament. Laurie read out a warm letter of support to the

Edinburgh seminar from the Mayor of Auckland (New Zealand's largest city) and its recently agreed Auckland Peace Declaration.

Following on from Laurie's presentation, Matt Robson, a former New Zealand Government Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control and now a PNND Organiser for South East Asia, outlined the Parliamentary moves that turned New Zealand from a supportive pro-nuclear country to a nuclear weapon free zone. He noted the similarities in this debate with that taking place in Scotland and across the United Kingdom at present over Trident replacement. He encouraged use of the New Zealand model as a template for change.

The final seminar speaker was Bill Kidd, Member of the Scottish Parliament and Co-Chair of the Parliament's Cross-party Group on Nuclear Weapons Disarmament as well as a PNND Co-President. Bill outlined the long-standing and high levels of public support in opinion surveys in Scotland to see it free of nuclear weapons. He noted the structure of the nuclear weapons debate in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom and the role the upcoming Scottish independence referendum and the wider debate on Trident replacement was having on whether the UK will remain a nuclear weapon state.

Following an engaging panel - audience discussion, the seminar closed on a musical theme with Alyn Ware of Abolition 2000 and PNND leading the attendees in a rendition of a popular New Zealand folk song seeking a nuclear free world. He also handed out copies of a joint declaration agreed at the Abolition 2000 AGM which was handed directly to the Naval Commander of the Faslane nuclear weapons base on the west coast of Scotland, an event which was taking place at the same time as the Edinburgh seminar. The Declaration emphasised the need for a nuclear weapons free Scotland and nuclear free British and Irish Isles.

The seminar was attended by councillors and activists from Scotland and further afield and was a highly useful and informative event for all those who attended it. All four speakers and the Chair and Secretary of the NFLA attended the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Preparatory Conference in Geneva the following week – a more detailed overview of this event will be placed on the NFLA website shortly.

Sean Morris

NFLA Secretary / UK & Ireland Mayors for Peace Working Group Secretary
30th April 2013



Lord Provost of Edinburgh Donald Wilson formally opens the NFLA Scotland joint seminar.



Left to right – NFLA Scotland Convenor Bill Butler, Dr Tadatoshi Akiba, Bill Kidd MSP.