

Letter to various UK newspapers, 23rd September 2009

NFLA welcomes Brown's statesmanship on nuclear disarmament

Dear Editor,

I am pleased to hear that Prime Minister Gordon Brown will be announcing tomorrow at the United Nations that the UK will unilaterally reduce the amount of Trident submarines from 4 to 3 (Gordon Brown follows Barack Obama's lead with cuts in Trident subs, Guardian, 23rd September).

Nuclear disarmament in the world is a complex and delicate business and tends to only happen when one state announces a practical commitment to do so. President Obama is to be praised for starting this task, and it is good news that the UK is following his lead. Only by showing practical leadership in reducing nuclear weapons can we show the likes of Iran and North Korea that we really mean business.

Of course the Nuclear Free Local Authorities wish to see the Government go much further. Trident replacement is likely to be one of the most expensive projects over the next decade and, with a public debt of some £805 billion, can it really be afforded at a time when we have other heavy defence commitments? Frontline local government services are likely to feel severe pressure in the next few years - surely it is better to spend our limited resources on these than on the possible £97 billion Trident replacement bill?

Well done Mr Brown! Now continue and finish the job by supporting the Mayors for Peace '2020 Vision' for a Nuclear Weapons Convention and the eventual elimination of the ultimate weapon of mass destruction by 2020.

Yours sincerely,
Baillie George Regan
Chair of Nuclear Free Local Authorities
c/o NFLA Secretariat, Manchester Town Hall

Letter to the Irish Times, 23rd September 2009

Irish Government can assist Obama's vision for a nuclear free world

Dear Editor,

President Obama will today speak to the United Nations General Assembly about one of his most visionary policy aims - a nuclear weapons free world (Obama prepares for maiden address to UN, Irish Times, 23rd September). The Nuclear Free Local Authorities All-Ireland Forum fully supports this lofty aim and commends the practical work to achieve it with recent bilateral talks between the USA and Russia on major cuts to nuclear weapon stockpiles. We are pleased to hear that the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown is also pledging to reduce the number of Trident nuclear submarines from 4 to 3. At last, after years of stagnation, progress in this important area seems to be taking place.

As a country that legally asserts no internal development of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, Ireland has much to give to support this initiative. Former Irish Minister Frank Aiken helped to establish the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, and I urge the Taoiseach and the current Foreign Minister Michael Martin to be at the heart of the current debate on nuclear weapons. We need to encourage full compliance by nuclear weapon states in reducing their stockpiles of the ultimate weapon of mass destruction.

Irish Councils can become an active part of this debate by joining the Hiroshima and Nagasaki led Mayors for Peace. Membership is free and allows for Irish Councils to sit firmly on the right side of the debate over creating a nuclear weapons free world.

I hope the fine words of world leaders are followed up with practical actions. A nuclear weapons free world by 2020 is a realistic possibility. I hope our Government can help lead the way to achieve this.

Yours sincerely,
Councillor Mark Dearey
Joint Chair, NFLA Ireland
c/o Dundalk Civic Offices

Letter to the Irish Herald, 21st September 2009

Dear Editor,

The important uncovering by the Herald and Sunday Herald, of an accidental leak of some 2600 litres of radioactive waste into the Firth of Clyde from the Hunterston nuclear power station, shows yet again the dangers of the nuclear power industry (Nuclear power put on final warning after leak, Herald, 20th September).

Just as with the recent uncovering of a similar incident at the Sizewell nuclear reactor in Suffolk, the Scottish public has a right to know why the Hunterston site is only getting a 'final warning' rather than being formally prosecuted. The Firth of Clyde has already been regularly contaminated with radioactive waste from the Trident submarines at Faslane a number of times in the last 5 years - what effect is all this dangerous waste having on our marine shores and to animal and human health? The safety record of the nuclear industry in Scotland and across the UK is of deep concern to the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) and confirms its belief that new nuclear build or Trident replacement should not be pursued for safety reasons, as much as for sensible economic reasons.

Scotland doesn't want nuclear new build, it doesn't want Trident replacement. This deeply worrying radioactive leak needs to be thoroughly investigated and much stronger action take by SEPA. Renewable energy is the way forward for Scotland - the Firth of Clyde will be much cleaner if it is embraced by Scotland.

Yours sincerely,
Councillor Euan McLeod
NFLA Scotland Convenor
c/o Glasgow City Chambers

Letter to The Guardian, 16th September 2009

Importance of supporting Obama and Brown in nuclear weapons cuts

Dear Sir,

This week is an important one for all those campaigning for cuts in nuclear weapons around the world. President Obama will be speaking to the United Nations General Assembly advocating the first major cuts in nuclear weapon stockpiles since the heady last days of the Cold War. The encouraging signs from President Medvedev that he will advocate cuts in Russian stockpiles, and the encouraging comments made by UK Foreign Minister David Miliband in today's Guardian

(New nuclear resolve, Guardian, 21st September), shows there is an unprecedented amount of goodwill for this lofty aim.

However, your accompanying article that Pentagon hawks in Washington are trying to slow down these positive steps (Obama faces battle with Pentagon hawks to achieve nuclear free goal, Guardian, 21st September), emphasises that all those dedicated for such cuts must support the President, our Prime Minister and the leaders of other nuclear weapon states in making firm commitments next May at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference.

The UK Government should also think clearly about its policy to replace and upgrade Trident. Given the important Greenpeace report suggests Trident replacement could cost as much as £97 billion, or 8.5% of the defence budget, perhaps now is the time to also rethink this policy at a time when deep public spending cuts are now being publicly promoted by all political leaders.

Yours sincerely,
Baillie George Regan
Chair of Nuclear Free Local Authorities UK and Ireland
c/o NFLA Secretariat, Manchester Town Hall

Letter to the Financial Times, 16th September 2009

Trident replacement should be cut back further

Dear Editor,

I note with interest the comments made by Defence Minister Bob Ainsworth that the Government may consider reducing spending on a replacement to the Trident nuclear weapons system from 4 submarines to 3 (Ministers ready to cut nuclear subs fleet, Financial Times, September 15th).

Such a policy would be welcomed by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA), but we suggest Mr Ainsworth should go further. As many senior political and military figures have suggested, Trident is an overly expensive extravagance that does not protect the UK from the key defence threats - international terrorism and attacks to our forces in Afghanistan. In the teeth of a public debt of £805 billion, and threatened public spending cuts of 10% per year for the next four years, which would decimate local government budgets in particular, we simply can't afford Trident replacement. Opinion polls show 57% of the public agree with the NFLA view.

Our key priorities over the next few years should be to invest in key frontline services such as health, education and our vulnerable social services. What defence spending is required should go on our conventional forces and combating terrorism. Follow President Obama's lead and start to reduce our unnecessary nuclear deterrent further.

Yours sincerely,
Baillie George Regan
Chair, Nuclear Free Local Authorities UK and Ireland
c/o NFLA Secretariat, Manchester Town Hall

Letter to The Independent, 8th September 2009

Scrap Trident and spend the money on what the people want

Dear Sir,

So the public have clearly spoken. Today's opinion poll in the Independent (Scrap Trident, voters tell Brown, Independent, 8th September), that a clear 58% of the public want to see the Trident nuclear missile upgrade scrapped in favour of increased spending on health and education, is warmly welcomed by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

In a time of deep recession, it makes economic common sense to scrap an upgrade that could cost upto a massive £76 billion. But it also makes practical common sense as well. Our armed forces in Afghanistan are not going to stop the Taliban with Trident. And it also makes moral common sense as well. Health and education services are what will make this country great in the future, not hugely destructive and pointless nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister Gordon Brown has said he is keen to be involved at the centre of the nuclear non-proliferation debate. He should study the poll carefully and go to next year's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ready to stand firm with President Obama, and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki-led Mayors for Peace, and start the peaceful process of reducing all nuclear stockpiles. Listen to the people and scrap Trident!

Yours sincerely,
Baillie George Regan
Chair, Nuclear Free Local Authorities UK and Ireland
c/o NFL A Secretariat
Manchester Town Hall