

Abolition 2000 UK

To Achieve for the New Century a Global Treaty to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons

==PRESS RELEASE==

UK Should Attend Nuclear Talks - *YouGov poll released today*

A full 75% of UK adults think the Government should be represented at nuclear disarmament talks due to begin at the United Nations next week. Only 9% said the Government should not attend and 16% were undecided.

The opinion poll was conducted in the wake of news reports suggesting that the Government would *not* attend the talks. The Government has long insisted that nuclear disarmament can only be achieved through ‘multilateral’ negotiations rather than through the ‘unilateral’ action of giving up our own nuclear weapons, but says the upcoming talks "will not bring us closer to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons".

Campaigners point out the illogic of making such a judgment before negotiations have even started. “If the UK were serious about achieving nuclear disarmament through multilateral negotiations, the government would not only be at these talks, but would be playing a leading role to make sure they succeed,” says Tim Wallis of Quaker Peace & Social Witness.

Most people in this country are unaware of the nuclear negotiations about to start in New York. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority clearly believes that if disarmament talks are taking place, our own Government should be there.

Among those who voted Tory in 2015, a solid 79% are in favour of the Government taking part in these negotiations. Those who voted Labour were equally adamant at 79%. In terms of age bracket, those most keen to see the Government contribute to nuclear disarmament worldwide are those aged 65 and over, many of whom can still remember the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the radioactive contamination caused by atmospheric tests of the 1950s. The younger age brackets had the highest percentages of ‘don’t knows’, but were still over 70% in favour of talking.

Geographically, the strongest support for participating in the negotiations came rather unsurprisingly from Scotland, where 82% favour the Government taking part. As with the Brexit negotiations, the Scottish Executive would prefer to be part of these talks independently of the Westminster Government. The SNP will be sending their own delegation of observers to the UN. It was recently confirmed that Fabian Hamilton, the Labour Party’s Shadow Minister for Peace & Disarmament, will also attend as an observer.

A poll conducted in Germany last year by the Forsa Institute indicated that 93% of German citizens supported negotiations to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Similar polls in Netherlands and Sweden have also yielded very high percentages in support of these negotiations.

The YouGov poll, commissioned by Abolition 2000 UK, asked a representative sample of UK adults, “Do you personally think the UK government should or should not be participating in [the upcoming nuclear ban treaty] negotiations?” Abolition 2000 UK is a network of more than 200 peace groups, churches and local authorities across the UK committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,951 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 15th - 16th March 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). Full results of the poll can be found at YouGov.com:
https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/79969vxty/Abolition_2000_UK_Results_Nuclear_170316_website.pdf

Contacts: Tim Wallis, QPSW, 020 7663 1067, timw@quaker.org.uk
Frank Jackson, A2000, 01279 300572, frank.jackson70@ntlworld.com
Russell Whiting, CND, 020 7700 2393, Russell.whiting@cnduk.org
Rebecca Johnson, ICAN, 07733 360955, rej@acronym.org

Abolition 2000 UK 162 Holloway Road London N7 8DQ email: mail@abolition2000uk.org
www.abolition2000uk.org

Additional background information – Nuclear ban treaty negotiations

Multilateral negotiations on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons worldwide are due to begin at the United Nations in New York on 27th March. The talks are expected to be concluded by mid-July, with the signing of a new international treaty that will ban nuclear weapons on the same basis that all other weapons of mass destruction have already been banned.

Since the dawn of the nuclear age in 1945, leading politicians have claimed, as Theresa May did last year, that their ultimate objective is “a world free of nuclear weapons”. Since the 1990s, nuclear stockpiles have been reduced to a quarter of what they were at the height of the Cold War. Nevertheless, that still leaves as many as 15,000 nuclear weapons worldwide, more than 2,000 of which are on hair-trigger alert and ready to be fired at a moment’s notice.

The detonation of a single nuclear weapon anywhere in the world, whether by accident or by design, would be a humanitarian catastrophe of unparalleled proportions. A so-called ‘small’ nuclear war between, say, India and Pakistan, could lead to the deaths of two billion people as a result of the impact on climate and food security, according to recent research. An all-out nuclear war between the US and Russia would be the end of human civilisation as we know it and possibly of all life on earth.

Negotiations to further reduce the nuclear threat have been blocked for decades while countries like the UK continue to upgrade and modernise their nuclear weapons. Despite their promise in 1968 to negotiate ‘in good faith’ and ‘at an early date’ the complete elimination of their nuclear arsenals, the nine countries which have nuclear weapons still refuse to give them up. For the first time ever, the rest of the world is assembling in New York to negotiate a total ban on all nuclear weapons – with or without those countries who still have them.

Over 120 countries are pledged to take part in these discussions, but so far the UK – along with the US and most other NATO countries – are refusing to attend. A memo from the US to all NATO capitals, urging those countries to stay away from the talks, was leaked to the press late last year. The memo made quite clear how powerful such a treaty could be in undermining the moral and legal acceptability of nuclear weapons worldwide.

With opinion polls in several NATO countries showing overwhelming support for the ban treaty, there is growing pressure for those governments to attend the negotiations. The European Parliament, as well as national parliaments in Belgium, Netherlands and Norway, have urged all countries to participate. Japan, another nuclear ally of the United States, voted against the negotiations taking place but then said they would be taking part in them.

Among the nuclear weapons states, China, India and Pakistan have all indicated a willingness to participate and North Korea voted in favour of the treaty negotiations. Virtually the whole of Latin America, the whole of Africa and the whole of Southeast Asia are already fully behind the treaty to ban all nuclear weapons.

The ban treaty is also strongly supported by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Trade Union Confederation, the World Medical Association, the World Council of Churches, the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

ICAN itself is a global coalition of over 400 partner organisations in 100 countries, including many churches and other religious communities. Similar coalitions were effective in pushing for the various climate talks and for the banning of landmines, cluster munitions and other categories of inhumane weapons.

The nuclear ban treaty will not, in itself, get rid of the weapons. The Landmines Treaty still has not rid the world of all landmines – and yet, countries like the United States, which are not even signatories to the Landmines Treaty, have nonetheless stopped using them.

International treaties have huge moral, as well as legal significance, even for the countries who do not sign them. There are also financial and technical costs for countries which insist on retaining nuclear weapons once they have been banned by international treaty. Banks will be prohibited from financing nuclear weapons programmes, and companies which make even the smallest parts that might go into a nuclear weapons system will also be prohibited from doing so. All countries who *do* sign up to the treaty, even if they do not have nuclear weapons of their own, will be legally bound by its restrictions on the financing, manufacture and supply chain for these weapons.

“It’s a no-brainer,” says Frank Jackson of Abolition 2000 UK. “Of course our government should be taking part in nuclear disarmament negotiations at the United Nations. The British peace movement has always supported multilateral, as well as unilateral, efforts to get rid of all nuclear weapons. The real irony is that while the Government keeps insisting the ‘only’ way to get rid of these vile weapons is multilaterally, the reality is that every step the UK has taken so far to cut its nuclear arsenal has been taken unilaterally!”

Another irony is that the US and Russia, generally considered to be the most likely adversaries in a nuclear war, and the main drivers of the nuclear arms race throughout the Cold War period, are now standing shoulder to shoulder in their opposition to a nuclear ban treaty. Indeed, it is their joint unwillingness to get rid of the very weapons that are designed to wipe each other out that is so threatening to the rest of the world and provides the incentive for other countries to press ahead without them.