

RfPUK Statement on the 75th Anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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On August 6th and 9th 1945, the United States, with the consent of the United Kingdom as laid out in the Quebec Agreement, detonated 2 nuclear bombs over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. 140,000 were dead within the year, hundreds of thousands more sustained radiation poisoning, physical mutilation and the following generations would be scarred by birth defects and other health complications. It took almost a decade for any organised efforts to voice opposition towards nuclear weapons in Japan as the Allied Occupation restricted discussion of the bombings.

The end of WWII laid bare the growing tension between USA and USSR, in the following decades the world watched as the nuclear arms race escalated with an alarming intensity. Although the bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the only ones ever deployed, testing results on either side of the race left no ambiguity about the devastating power of this weapon. Together with horrendous accidents at nuclear power plants in ensuing years, we were all aware that the cataclysmic force was not completely harnessed, even if the technology took on peaceful missions. In the Cold War years, the US had developed 175 million times the destructive force than the A bomb, and to this day, the US and Russia together holds over 90% of the world's nuclear stockpile.

From the 1960s onwards, many anti-nuclear movements came and went. The Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1968, and even with the relative success of the 1987 Reagan Gorbachev Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the world we are in and the countries we are citizens of are still not in agreement regarding this issue. The US and Russia are increasingly fighting their wars on foreign soil, thus rendering the nuclear weapons' "deterrent" factor for self preservation somewhat arguable. The rise of non-state terrorism also poses horrific danger if the weapons are in the hands of organised militia with no fixed territories for any bomb to deliver retaliation. While most African, Latin American, Southeast Asian and Pacific island states were willing to enter into UN resolution 71/258 which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of the

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017 (<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>) , none of the nuclear armed countries signed the treaty. Following the treaty's adoption, the permanent missions of the United States, the United Kingdom and France issued a joint statement indicating that they did not intend "to sign, ratify or ever become party to it", citing again the "stabilising effect" of the deterrent factor.

World politics has changed a great deal since 1945. With new players in the nuclear arena such as North Korea, India, Pakistan, Iran and Israel each with their development programme, it is no longer the two-player game between USA and Russia we once knew. Increasingly, we see world powers using nuclear threat as a political strategy rather than a military tactic, the delicately balanced terror of total annihilation dictates international relationships. Destructive weapons on land, in the sea and even in space threaten the existence of all life as we know it. Einstein once said "Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order —in short, of government." It seems that the broadly right-wing elected governments in the US and UK are turning back on the values that once defined conservatism. Populism permeates politics in both the East and West, and the threat of war, instead of diminishing as most peoples would wish, looms large and real as economy trends grind to a screeching halt amidst Covid 19. Despite pressing health issues and the onslaught of unprecedented unemployment, the US announced the beginning of nuclear testing consideration in May 2020, when the UK resumed arms sales to Saudi Arabia in July.

The love of power has driven many authoritarian leaders to assert influence by force and threat when domestic politics is not turning out campaign promised advantages and elections have to be won. Shock tactics surface more and more, battles cries on physical fronts as well as economic sanctions further deepen suspicion and distrust between long term adversaries and even allies. Maybe it seems futile to wave around banners to assert the power of love in the corridors of Westminster, we who have the power to vote can stay alert, be informed and reflect sensitively and sensibly to our rights and duties, and exercise our choice in elections. Hold our democratic governments accountable that they are not using the excuse of economy to engage in activities that endangers world peace, in any way.

On this day, August the 6th of each year, let us always remember the words of Hiroshima survivor Sanao Tsuboi, "On a map without country names, there is a peace bell that anyone can ring".