Open-ended working group
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Panel III

Additional measures to increase awareness and understanding of the complexity of and interrelationship between the wide range of humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear detonation

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I’d like to speak today about the inherent democratic deficit of nuclear weapons, gendered norms in arming and disarming, and climate change from Scotland’s unique perspective.

30 years ago today, a hard rain fell on the misty mountains of Scotland, bringing radiation from the Chernobyl disaster of the previous week. Levels of Caesium-137 from Chernobyl remain higher in Scotland than England. Sheep from Scotland required testing until as recently as 2010.

In 1962, a group of Swiss women, seeking the elimination of all nuclear weapons held a silent vigil here at the Pregny gate called “We Have Had Enough,” in response to the accident at the French underground nuclear test in the Algerian Sahara on 1 May 1962. A hundred soldiers and officials were irradiated by that accident. If those women had had enough in 1962, I can imagine that they might be experiencing significant distress at this stage.

Increased health risks for pregnant women and children is not the only gendered effect of nuclear weapons. Our activism against nuclear weapons often goes unheard, our actions forgotten. Alternatives to weapons and war are treated as weak—as feminine.

Being powerful, strong, and masculine is associated in our culture with being ready to go for the military option and wield a weapon. This is a constructed “masculine” behaviour. People who want to talk, put the weapons down, or abolish them altogether are seen as feminine, and interpreted as weak. These gendered perspectives, which equate effectiveness with military spending and dominance, have also perpetuated the exclusion of women from authoritative political roles.

Last November, I attended the 70 year Commemorative Nuclear Victims Forum in Hiroshima. John Hersey’s account of the effects of the bomb had introduced me as a teenager to that appalling act of deliberate devastation and destruction. In addition to hearing from Hibakusha, I heard testimony from women evacuees from Fukushima and Korean nuclear survivors. I watched the film that tells the story of the Uranium Corporation of India, which has caused a tragedy in northeastern India for the environment, and for the people of Jaduguda.
These terrible and unacceptable nuclear effects represent a democratic deficit that beggars belief in a modern world with technology that can put people on the moon and transplant the human heart. Nuclear weapon technology is mired in sinister secrecy. Every step is conducted without the knowledge, permission, or acceptance of the world’s people. This is a very bitter pill that brings no healing.

The UK’s nuclear weapons are all in Scotland and cannot be put anywhere else. Please consider the robust evidence in John Ainslie’s, No Place for Trident from Scottish CND. Fully armed nuclear warheads are transported on a regular basis between Coulport near Glasgow to the south of England for maintenance, without even any warning signage for road users or independent emergency procedures outside of the secret Ministry of Defence arrangements.

At the UK Parliament, Scotland sent 58 MPs to London to represent us. 57 of them say no to Trident and yes to the Humanitarian Pledge. Scotland is holding its Parliamentary election tomorrow, and whatever the result, the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood and its people maintain a commitment to a nuclear free future, making a contribution to global human security through achieving our climate change targets, and continuing to develop renewable energy and food security. That Parliament will also maintain its much better gender balance than Westminster and may be able to influence the UK’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

Acceleration of climate change and environmental degradation are profound challenges. Any nuclear attack or accident would worsen that. Climate change or environmental degradation could also trigger deliberate or accidental detonation.

Militarised responses to movements of people creates rather than resolves conflict. Military expenditure is rising so fast that governments cannot meet the basic needs of the people they represent or provide resources to tackle climate change, which is in turn a major cause of resource shortages and conflict. It is increasingly urgent that energy and food can be produced locally. The elimination of the nuclear threat would effectively reduce these risks.

At the Nuclear Victims Forum, the outcome document reaffirmed that every stage of the nuclear chain contaminates the environment and damages the ecosystem. It also called for the urgent conclusion of a legally binding international instrument which prohibits and provides for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom supported the establishment of the United Nations and the adoption of its very first resolution, which contained a commitment to nuclear disarmament. This spirit should be honoured today through the negotiation of a treaty banning nuclear weapons once and for all.