



Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace - the ecumenical peace church network of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe

For a World without Nuclear Weapons - An appeal on the 74th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945

Wethen, 7 August 2019.

Church and Peace appeals to Christian churches and communities throughout Europe:

Call on the government of your country to become a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Strengthen the people and initiatives in churches, civil society, and politics, who are committed to peace and disarmament, through your prayers, public statements and active participation.

Support people of goodwill from all religions and denominations who are committed to global and complete nuclear disarmament for humanitarian reasons, e.g. the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN, recipient of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize), Mayors for Peace, the medical organisation IPPNW, and the Red Cross.

Assist the victims of the Balkan wars, who are ill due to exposure to radioactive uranium ammunition and raise awareness on this issue.

Call on your national government to work within the European Union for a new multilateral agreement involving the United States and Russia to ban the deployment of short- and medium-range missiles in Europe.

Background:

Shortly after the end of World War II, the European ecumenical peace network "Church and Peace" was founded in 1949. For 70 years the associated churches, congregations, communities, and peace ministries have been working for reconciliation and peace, nonviolence and justice as an integral part of their discipleship as followers of Jesus.

At an international conference to mark the 70th anniversary of the foundation of Church and Peace, delegates discussed current developments regarding the increasing militarisation of Europe and the growing nuclear threat. Some members are particularly affected: they give eyewitness reports on the consequences of the use of radioactive uranium ammunition in parts of former Yugoslavia, consequences which are still visible today. Other members of Church and Peace are in contact with survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the nuclear weapons tests of the past decades.

We are alarmed by the current dangers posed by nuclear weapons and radioactive munitions in Europe.

Only a small number of states in the world have control over around 15,000 nuclear weapons, each of which exceeds the explosive power of the atomic bombs detonated over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. These nuclear weapons are currently undergoing technical modernisation and the warheads are being reduced in size, which means that they are more likely to be used. This is coupled with a global political situation characterised by new crises and tensions, including among the nine nuclear weapon states.

In several respects, European countries and the people living here are affected by the current dangers and are involved in the situation:

- The INF Treaty, which was important for security in Europe and in which the USA and the former Soviet Union agreed on the prohibition and complete scrapping of their short- and medium-range nuclear missiles, has been terminated first by the USA and then by Russia on the basis of mutual accusations of violation of the treaty.
- All nine nuclear weapon states are in the process of technically upgrading their nuclear arsenals and delivery platforms (e.g. aircraft). The greater accuracy of the modernised weapons creates the fatal impression that a regionally limited use of nuclear weapons is possible. This lowers the political threshold which inhibits states from starting a nuclear war.
- The places where nuclear weapons are deployed in Europe are especially threatened, as they were during the Cold War, as potential targets in wartime or targets of terrorist attacks. They are also threatened by possible accidents.
- People from Bosnia, Serbia, and Kosovo report numerous cases of illness among the population, including children, due to the radioactive uranium ammunition, which was used by NATO units during the wars and can still be found in some parts of the region today.
- Churches in Africa as well as South and North America witness that many armed conflicts also revolve around the mining of uranium and rare earth metals needed for the production of nuclear technology.
- European banks are involved in the co-financing of nuclear weapons. It is only through these investments that it is possible to produce a renewed arsenal of nuclear weapons.
- The modernisation of nuclear warheads and delivery systems ties up enormous financial resources from nuclear weapon states and other states, which are urgently needed, also in Europe, for people affected by poverty, hunger, and violence, and for education and climate protection.

We are alarmed by the risks of a nuclear war, which would be irreversible.

Research into the consequences of a possible war involving the use of nuclear weapons concludes that the consequences for human life, nature, and the climate would trigger disasters of uncontrollable proportions. No aid organisation would be able to protect human lives from radioactive radiation and fallout. Present and future generations would be extremely burdened by serious diseases and contamination of land and the atmosphere. Even in a regionally limited nuclear war, made possible by the reduction in the size of nuclear

warheads, the number of civilian casualties would be extremely high and the climatic impact on food production would cause billions of people to starve.¹

In the Spirit of Jesus Christ we are called to peace - churches against nuclear weapons

We believe that Jesus Christ has called us to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). The mission of the globally interconnected churches is to commit themselves to overcoming injustice, poverty, and war and to promote the peaceful coexistence and common security of all people.

Threatening to destroy hundreds of thousands of people and to radioactively irradiate entire continents contradicts everything which is, according to Biblical testimony, entrusted to us as people who trust in Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of nuclear deterrence has nothing to do with national defence or violence sanctioned by the state, forms of violence which, in most churches, are recognised as ethically legitimate. Nuclear deterrence constitutes an extremely inhumane threat, contrary to international law, to destroy hundreds of thousands and maybe millions of people.

In this spirit, the synods and other governing bodies of many churches have in recent years declared that their faith in Jesus Christ contradicts the ethical legitimacy of threatening or using nuclear weapons, e.g. the United Church of Christ (USA), the Churches of Sweden and Norway, the United Reformed Church of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches in Korea, the National Council of Churches in Japan, the Moderamen of the Reformed Federation in Germany, and the German Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

After ten years of continuous campaigning by the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), supported by many civil society organisations such as the International Red Cross, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican, the United Nations Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), was adopted on 7 July 2017. The treaty was approved by 122 of the states gathered in the United Nations and has since been signed by 70 of them.

The agreement fills a gap in international law. It prohibits the development, testing, production, transport, storage, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. The states which still possess nuclear weapons are thereby ethically delegitimised by the majority of states.

This historic treaty needs continuing and unequivocal public support from worldwide ecumenism and as many churches and denominations as possible.

Church and Peace therefore turns to the synods and church governing bodies in Europe and calls on them to address their own governments and to adopt a strong stance in favour of the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty.

1 Several studies are quoted in: Peter Rudolf, Aporien Atomarer Abschreckung, Zur US-Nukleardoktrin und ihren Problemen, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Studie 15, Berlin, July 2018; International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons: www.icanw.org/the-facts; International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War www.ippnw.org.

Some examples of Christian churches' support for the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty:

Ever since the foundation of the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**, all its assemblies have called for disarmament of all nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons systems. The WCC was instrumental in supporting the various disarmament policy initiatives of civil society and international organisations and expert groups which led to the International Biological Weapons Treaty (1972), the Chemical Weapons Treaty (1993), the Landmine Treaty (1997), and the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). At its last assembly in 2013, WCC representatives reaffirmed the call made in several previous assemblies to outlaw the production, possession, and use of nuclear weapons as a 'crime against humanity' for ethical and theological reasons.

Pope Francis repeatedly supported the conclusion of the UN Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty (TPNW). The Vatican was one of the first signatories. In November 2017, the Pope spoke out in favour of overcoming the doctrine of nuclear deterrence: *"Nor can we fail to be genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices. If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned. For they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race."*

The 2018 assembly of the **Conference of European Churches (CEC)** in Novi Sad called for outspoken opposition to *"any further research and production of nuclear weapons."*

In a statement (*Nuclear Ban Motion*) on 13 July 2018, the **General Synod of the Church of England** expressly supported the UN Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty and the demand for total and complete nuclear disarmament and appealed to its own government.

In 2018, the **Evangelical Church in the Rhineland**, Germany adopted a peace statement (*Friedenwort 2018*), which states on the subject of nuclear weapons: *"We affirm that the threat of not only nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction can no longer be regarded as a means of legitimate self-defence. Trusting in God's peace, we no longer wish to find ourselves surrounded, protected or endangered by such weapons."* The statement demands the removal of the nuclear weapons in Büchel in the Eifel, Germany, and of all nuclear weapons throughout Europe and calls on the Federal Government to sign the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty.