

## Action ideas:

There is detailed information on these issues available from many sources (contact details given in our earlier leaflets) and there will be many opportunities for campaigning and for diplomatic initiatives in the year leading up to the 2005 NPT Review Conference. Below is the text from one of the many recent calls for renewed efforts in this area, which we hope will provide a useful framework for action.

*(Excerpts from a statement by the World Council of Churches Executive Committee, February 2004)*

The Executive Committee;

Reiterates its grave and ongoing concern that certain policies and practices of nuclear weapon states undermine international progress toward nuclear disarmament...

Welcomes the ongoing struggle of many governments and civil society groups to advance nuclear disarmament and to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons ...

Urges all States to make renewed and unprecedented efforts to ensure that the current NPT review process, leading to the 2005 NPT Review Conference, reinvigorates nuclear disarmament efforts, leads states to recommit to the principles and goals of the NPT, and sets the world on a path toward the final elimination of nuclear weapons through a series of bold measures...

Encourages civil society organizations to:

Continue to monitor nuclear weapons issues and developments;

Continue to challenge states to redouble their nuclear disarmament efforts in accord with the requirement of the NPT and, especially, in accord with the requirements for human security;

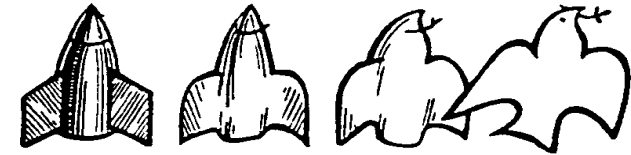
Urge the states responsible for carrying out nuclear tests, that adequate compensation should be given to victims of these tests;

Calls on churches in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence to renew their witness for peace and disarmament through education, public awareness building and advocacy to overcome the continuing threat of nuclear weapons

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## Northern Friends Peace Board

Challenging Militarism Project

Signpost leaflet April 2004

# Nuclear Weapons at a crossroads

*The US administration demands from other states not to have any nuclear weapons, while it fills its own arsenals. Then, a few privileged ones will be covered by a nuclear umbrella - and the rest of the world is left to its own devices. In reality, however, there are no good or evil weapons of mass destruction. **If we do not give up such double standards, we will have even more nuclear powers. We are at a turning point now.***

Mohammed ElBaradei,  
Director General of the International Atomic Energy  
Agency, August 2003

*(Translated from a German interview)*

In our first leaflet of this series we outlined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Since then, the UK and US have been the main players in a war that was sold to the public as tackling the problem of weapons of mass destruction. Calls have come from concerned individuals and organisations across the world in recent months, for all countries to turn away from new nuclear weapons developments and to take active steps to implement the NPT nuclear disarmament obligations. What does the future hold for the UK's nuclear commitments? What are the particular challenges of the coming year?

## **Blind faith or blind alley?**

In 2005 there is to be a full Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Continued possession of Trident Nuclear Weapons by the UK as a 'minimum' deterrent seems to contradict the commitment reaffirmed at the 2000 conference to work towards complete disarmament of nuclear weapons. The UK's role and policies in international disarmament are not entirely negative however, and the government needs to know that people are still concerned to see this process addressed with determination.

The government states that *'the fundamental role of the UK's nuclear weapons is political, not military and we have repeatedly stated that we would only consider their use in extreme circumstances of self defence'*. Geoff Hoon, Defence Secretary, elaborated on this in February 2003 to say that they would use them against non-nuclear states, 'in the right conditions'.

If such conditions can exist for the UK, the government is on shaky ground when it insists that other countries should not even possess them.

## **Replacing Trident?**

A key issue facing the UK government in the near future is the possible replacement of its current Trident nuclear weapons system. The last submarine of the fleet of these was only rolled out of the dockyards in Barrow in Furness in the late 1990s. But the time it takes to design and build any replacement means that a decision will need to be made early in the next Parliament about whether to do this and how. The Ministry of Defence states that *'Decisions on whether to replace Trident are not needed this Parliament but are likely to be required in the next one. We will therefore continue to take appropriate steps to ensure that the range of options for maintaining a nuclear deterrent capability is kept open until that decision point.'*

It is vital that there should be a parliamentary debate on this issue and that into this is injected a rigorous questioning of any justification for the UK's continued possession of these or other weapons of mass destruction. The development of new facilities at Aldermaston, such as the proposed laser-testing buildings, should also be scrutinised with a question about whether they are the early infrastructure for new weapons development.

## **Partnership**

A key mechanism for cementing the close relationship between the US and the UK on nuclear weapons issues is the Mutual Defence Agreement. This is due for renewal in 2004 and it is to be hoped that Members of Parliament will get a good opportunity to debate this crucial issue. The sharing of nuclear weapons technology between the two countries is the key component of this agreement. We might ask whether the UK can ever free itself from the millstone of nuclear weapons whilst it remains tied so firmly to the nuclear-committed US.

## **No offence meant but a lot already taken**

The US is developing a missile defence system that is supposed to defend the US and its allies from attack by ballistic missiles. The UK is very supportive of this approach to protecting us from 'rogue states'. But it is already clear that this costly system – whether or not it will work – is provoking unease and aspirations by other countries to develop new weapons to get past the missile defences. A new arms race is beginning.

Allied to this – as part of the emerging US military policy - is the proposed development by the US of 'low-yield' nuclear weapons. The idea that small nuclear weapons should be developed as an integral part of the military's usable weaponry has now taken hold in the US administration and considerable funds have been allocated to researching this. The UK has not openly talked about following this trend and should be encouraged to use its influence by dissuading the US from going any further along this dangerous path.

## **PSI – Coalition of the willing flexes its muscles**

Whilst it will undoubtedly be important to limit the spread of nuclear weapons technology, the Proliferation Security Initiative is problematic. This counter-proliferation initiative set up by the US involves it and its chosen allies in a commitment to sharing intelligence, tracking international cargo, searching shipments and seizing weapons or other equipment that may raise concerns. But the PSI exists outside UN and other international legal frameworks and again reinforces a perception of a nuclear 'them' (who aren't permitted to have the technology) and 'us' (who are).