

Presentation to Walk for Peace activists Sept 21, 2024 Halifax
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First, I'd like to bring greetings from Canadian Pugwash Group and its Chair Cesar Jaramillo to this event and in praise of those who made it through those 200 km, or a portion of them.

As you all know -- particularly here in Nova Scotia -- Pugwash means a lot for the pursuit of peace, ever since the village and Cyrus Eaton offered space in 1957 for what became the International Pugwash movement.

Joseph Rotblat (as most of you also know) was the only Manhattan Project scientist that left the bomb project mid-way through. He did this after learning that Germany had given up on its pursuit of an atomic weapon. This is an important point to remember. Pugwash leaders Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein and Joseph Rotblat, despite their scruples, all initially supported the development of a nuclear weapon because they saw it (reluctantly) as a necessary deterrent against Nazi Germany.

International Pugwash (Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs) is devoted not only to nuclear arms control but also to the goal of elimination of nuclear weapons, and more broadly to general disarmament and an end to war. We recognize that these objectives will be accomplished through dialogue, particularly between the nuclear weapon states; but as well conflict resolution is best accomplished through conversation, preventative measures and non-offensive forms of defence.

Canadian Pugwash supports Canada signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (the TPNW) as soon as possible. In the meantime Canada can attend the meetings of treaty state parties as an observer. This is the view also of the CNANW, the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, of which Pugwash is a part, along with some of the other groups participating in the Walk for Peace.

Canada is a member of the NATO alliance, in fact a founding member, and to accede to the TPNW Canada will have to renounce its continuing support for nuclear deterrence doctrine or nuclear weapon use, relentlessly and without letup. This is because Article 1(e) of the TPNW prohibits signatories from assisting encouraging or enducing in nuclear weapons activity "in any way".* That is a big step to take, particularly given there is no evidence that our country is ready to rock the boat, nor will it be exiting the alliance anytime soon, and certainly not in order to sign the treaty.

To those who argue that nuclear weapons haven't been used since 1945, which is mostly true, let's remember that more precisely, they haven't been detonated since then in wartime. They have, however, been used as a deterrent measure, and that is their proclaimed primary (or even sole) purpose. This was the case in the standoffs between the US and former Soviet Union for 45 years. And more recently their use has been threatened.

Ask yourself this: If there were no nuclear weapons in the picture in the current Ukraine-Russia war, would Russia have invaded Ukraine? And if Russia had invaded, would NATO members then have directly responded against Russia? Hard to answer either of those questions with certainty. But we must ask the questions.

Nuclear deterrence is a real thing, and we can debate perhaps forever if it works or not.

Regardless, there is an obvious difficulty for abolition which we don't talk about enough. It is clear that we need political leadership within countries, particularly in nuclear weapon armed states and NATO member states, and we need what we term "political will".

Political will: Depending on the country, we tend to think it might be generated by effective public opinion. We have seen examples of political will in Canada in the past.** Not so much, recently.

But the core generator of public opinion and political will is not just fear and an abhorrence of what nuclear war would do to humanity. The other problem is "security", whether we have it, and whether people feel they are protected. This is the conversation we need to have but rarely do, about common security: what it is and how we achieve it.

Common security must be built and rebuilt because it doesn't arrive fully formed as a credible alternative to nuclear deterrence or war. It isn't easy and it takes time, but it is a necessary project.

Can we have abolition of nuclear weapons without a common security replacement? The answer is: NO.

Will Canada sign the TPNW while NATO sees nuclear weapons as the "essential" deterrent against aggression and war? I think not, but many do think Canada might still attend the TPNW meetings as observer.***

Attending would show solidarity with the abolition mission, while we prepare the necessary security transition. What is fundamental to protecting these norms and treaties, and expanding them, is the establishment of a robust common security system, by which we mean: shared, not competitive security.

Non-offensive defence, which is not fully a commitment to non-violence, was first proposed in 1976 (Horst Afheldt), and is still a required step towards both nuclear disarmament and avoidance of war. It is also an important component of common security, which itself was introduced with the Palme Commission Report in 1982.

That thinking was that "stability does not arise from the equality of force", nor from superiority in an endless arms race -- but from "defensive over offensive capabilities". A state needs to assure its own security without posing a threat to others.

International Pugwash was a key forum for East-West discussion of alternative defence during the Cold War, and their workshops were brought to the attention of then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who was supportive. Gorbachev would go on to reduce Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and remove 500 short range (tactical) nuclear weapons. This would lead to the Convention on Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in 1990. This would result in mutual limitations on major armaments for NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the creation of systems to resolve compliance issues, and to reduce risks.

We had a too-brief peace dividend but we did not fully commit to common security.

The current political climate and tensions, however, are not unlike those of the worst days of the Cold War. But it is not hopeless – as those who walked the 200 km (or some of them) will attest. Public attention, and with luck media attention, can influence officials who across partisan lines also want nothing to do with nuclear war. The goal is to provide credible alternatives to help guide policy. It's a long haul, one footstep at a time.

Congratulations to all of those involved in the Walk for Peace and for your commitment and sacrifices. You have brought significant attention to a great and continuing cause, one that must succeed. Well done, and Happy World Peace Day to you all.

Notes:

*States-parties are prohibited to use, threaten to use, develop, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess, stockpile, transfer, station, or install nuclear weapons or assist with any prohibited activities. (A civil society position in Canada that was broadly agreed: "Sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons with an accompanying statement that Canada will, through dialogue and changes to its own policies and practices, persist in its efforts to bring NATO into conformity with the Treaty, with a view to Canada ratifying the Treaty as soon as possible." However, after the treaty came into force, prospective signatories could only accede to the treaty so a sign-now-then-ratify-later option is no longer available.)

**Examples include John Diefenbaker in insisting on not hosting US missiles on Canadian soil; Pierre Trudeau in his peace efforts in the 1980s; Lloyd Axworthy and Jean Chrétien in calling for a review in NATO of its nuclear policies in the late 1990s.

***We think Canada came very close to doing so last year, particularly after other NATO states attended:

in 2023: Belgium, Germany and Norway

In 2022: Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway