



Questions

- How does thinking about nuclear weapons make you feel?
- If Scotland were to become independent, what should happen to the UK's nuclear weapons, based at Faslane?
- Is it acceptable for campaigners to break the law when protesting against weapons of mass destruction that are inherently evil?
- Will global disarmament be achieved quicker if Britain gives up its weapons unilaterally, or should it be part of an international, negotiated multilateral process?
- How much weight do politicians give to the status of Britain being a nuclear weapons state? And how much weight do they give to arguments about the costs of maintaining a nuclear weapons system? And what about the moral arguments?

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SRT Project, Church and Society Council
121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN
Tel: 0131 240 2267
Email: srtp@cofscotland.org.uk
Website: www.srtp.org.uk

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353
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www.churchofscotland.org.uk



The Church of Scotland
Church and Society Council

Society, Religion and Technology Project

Nuclear weapons



Discussion Points



'They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.' Isaiah 2:4



Nuclear Weapons

For 30 years the Church of Scotland has consistently condemned the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order.

With other Churches in Scotland, the United Kingdom and around the world we have campaigned for disarmament and urged the countries that possess nuclear weapons to abide by their international treaty obligations and work together for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Proliferation

There are eight recognised nuclear weapons states: the UK, USA, China, Russia, France, North Korea, India and Pakistan. Israel is also believed to possess nuclear weapons although this has not been confirmed by the Israeli Government. Iran is alleged to be developing nuclear weapons capability.

"In 2012 there were reckoned to be approximately 17,000 nuclear warheads in the world's nuclear arsenals, with 4,300 of these being "operational"- i.e. ready for use.

Legality

In 1996 the International Court of Justice ruled that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be a violation of the law of armed conflict, and certainly of humanitarian law.

Britain is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which includes an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

Morality

Some Christians argue that nuclear weapons can never be justified, whereas others believe that, although their existence



is regrettable, they have been and are still necessary to maintain global security. Both views are valid approaches to a Christian understanding of peacemaking.

The Church of Scotland, along with other Churches in Scotland, has stated its belief that nuclear weapons are so destructive and so harmful to civilians and the natural world that they are inherently evil; to possess, threaten or use such terrible weapons of mass destruction is a dreadful concept which fundamentally threatens the future of humanity as a species. The possession of nuclear weapons by some states and not others has also created a two tier ranking of countries on the world stage, with the 'haves' having the power to utterly destroy the 'have-nots', a system which stimulates revolutionary or dictatorial regimes to seek to acquire nuclear weapons, either for their own protection or to threaten their neighbours with annihilation. The Churches are convinced that lasting peace comes about not through threatening destruction but through reconciliation and shared prosperity. Nuclear weapons, and defence expenditure should also be seriously considered at a time of national and global austerity.

Trident Replacement

Britain's nuclear weapons are deployed on Trident missiles which can be launched from four Vanguard class submarines. Each submarine carries eight missiles and a total of 40 nuclear warheads. Each warhead is seven times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. The UK has a total of 160 operational available warheads. There is a Trident submarine on patrol at all times, to provide a 'continuous at-sea deterrent'.

Although Vanguard class submarines will last until 2028, plans are being made now about replacing them. The government plan to keep a new nuclear weapon system in service until the 2060s. This will require the replacement of not just the submarines, but also the missiles and the nuclear warheads.

The Churches believe that this point in time represents the best opportunity to convince the Government that they should not seek to replace Trident, and to get rid of Britain's nuclear weapons. This would save billions of pounds and would put the UK at the forefront of international efforts towards global nuclear disarmament.