

Minute of meeting of the Cross Party Group on Nuclear Disarmament 1 April 2014

MSPs present: Bill Kidd, Kevin Stewart and Dave Thompson

Also present: Rebecca Sharkey (ICAN) Dr Judith Macdonald, Dr Duncan Macintyre, Dr Helen Zealley and other representatives of MEDACT

The meeting was an opportunity for members of the CPG to meet with the Nuclear Issues Group of MEDACT.

After welcome and introductions from Bill, Judith outlined Medact's history of activity in opposition to nuclear weapons. She reflected on her visit to Hiroshima for the IPPNW congress in emphasising that this opposition arose from a humanitarian concern over the impossibility of any useful medical response to the devastation caused by nuclear explosion. The risk of use of a nuclear weapon by design or 'accident' leads to rejection of the deterrence argument and therefore the imperative of a nuclear weapons ban. Those of present at this meeting had been active during the arms build-up of the 1980s when MCANW was founded. A major campaigning concern as present is the extent of ignorance or unconcern over nuclear weapons issues amongst younger generations.

Helen Zealley pursued this problem of increasing awareness. As a Director of Public Health she had been active in the formation of the Edinburgh MCANW group in response to the nonsense of the government's 'Protect and Survive' programme for nuclear attack. Within a short period of time the group attracted around 200 members. We need to highlight to the healthcare audience and the general public that the urgency of the nuclear issue remains with us. 'We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors but borrow it from our grandchildren'.

Rebecca Sharkey described the ICAN approach towards a treaty for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Any use would clearly affect non-nuclear as well as nuclear states - a parallel here with the way in which passive smoking concerns activated some anti-tobacco legislation. Again the starting point is the impossibility of any humanitarian response. This explains why 93 countries and over 300 NGOs have joined together in this endeavour. Abolition treaties have been agreed for biological and chemical weapons - nuclear must be next.

Discussion focussed on the challenge of putting nuclear issues on the agenda of the young. Dave Thompson MSP suggested approaching local education authorities with information that might be used for example in 6th year studies programmes. At this level there is a degree of flexibility in course content. Links could be made between issues of environmental concern, conflict and nuclear weapons possession. An exercise to ascertain the extent to which such issues are already addressed would also be worthwhile. Many Scottish local authorities belong to the association of Nuclear Free Authorities. They might therefore be expected to respond favourably to an approach. Kevin Stewart MSP emphasised the importance of social media such as Twitter in having any message spread amongst younger generations. In concluding remarks Bill Kidd again spoke of the importance of ICAN as a part of taking things forward.