

Present (Parliamentarians):

Bill Kidd

John Finnie

Representing Elaine Smith, Sean Duffy

Representing Ruth Maguire, Ashley Douglas

Assistant to Bill Kidd, Jenny Holt

Apologies:

Present (Civil Society Organisations):

Brian Larkin (Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre)

Janet Fenton (ND Xparty Group Secretary)(SCND WILPF International)

Gari Don (UNA Scotland)

Guy Johnson (MEDACT)

Tony Wilkes (Quakers in Scotland)

Anne Scott (WILPF Scottish branch)

Jane Tallents (Trident Ploughshares in Scotland)

David Mackenzie (Nukewatch in Scotland)

Veronika Tudhope (SCND)

(Observers)

Gabriella Castaneda (UNA Scotland)

Deanna Woodman (UNA Scotland)

Apologies:

Steve Davies (SNP CND)

The meeting was chaired by Bill Kidd MSP

1. Introductions:

The meeting began with a brief round of introductions.

Minutes agreed with one correction, Brendan O'Hara is recorded as an MP, not an MSP.

2. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

1)Ban Treaty

Bill and Janet gave a summary of the UN Ban Treaty negotiations in New York. which they had attended. This concluded with a vote to establish a Conference to negotiate the Ban Treaty in New York, starting 27 March, and continuing and concluding in June and July with 123 in support, 38 against and 16 abstentions. ICAN will hold a campaigners conference on 25/26 March to brief NGO reps.

During the discussions before the vote nuclear-armed states put huge pressure on NATO and other dependent states for support. It was notable that there were some abstentions from countries which might have been expected to vote with the nuclear-armed states, e.g. the Netherlands. The UK and US diplomats behaved particularly arrogantly, utilising a break in standing orders to speak off the record about non-nuclear weapons states being foolhardy and ignorant about security. The conference is a huge step forward in making it possible to achieve the NPT aim of multilateral disarmament.

Next year's conference creates the potential of a treaty at the beginning of July ready to be signed and ratified, thus placing nuclear weapons on the same footing as chemical weapons, mines and cluster bombs. Although not all countries are expected to sign it will carry huge weight. Beatrice Fihn (ICAN CEO) had informally suggested that the treaty negotiation may not be achieved in the time frame, but in this case the UN will identify another period to continue the talks.

The Ban Treaty negotiations were the recommendation of the UN 'open-ended' working group to fill the legal gap in prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons' (OEWG) which met on 3 separate occasions last year. The UK boycotted this process as well as voting against the Treaty.

Campaigners in the UK are concentrating on encouraging the UK FCO to participate in the discussions. In Scotland there is a slightly different perspective because the UK government is not only boycotting the negotiations, but misrepresenting Scotland, which does support the Ban Treaty. Now that the democratic deficit on Brexit for Scotland is being discussed internationally, this perspective should be applied to nuclear weapons in Scotland and representation should be sought, e.g. via written questions on how Scotland's view is communicated.

This group may be able to work with UK Parliamentary CND (there is no APPG on nuclear disarmament at Westminster) to communicate and co-operate. (Janet and Jenny)

A SCND briefing on the Ban Treaty will soon be available to bring together and inform people on the issue.(Janet)

2)NPT Preparatory Committee

There followed discussion on The NPT preparatory committee which will be taking place in Vienna in May. While the ban treaty has overtaken the NPT in potential for effectiveness, it is important that its arguments on how the Ban Treaty are used as an effective tool in bringing the nuclear weapons states to accountability over Article VI . Scottish parliamentarians and NGOs should still be encouraged to attend. Despite the difficulties, the significance of changing the UK's policy to boycott the ban treaty conference cannot be underestimated, nor the impact of Scottish politicians speaking out and being present on the international diplomatic stage .

3)Participation

Scottish parliamentarians participating at an international level are limited to representation as part of an NGO; Scotland is not a member state or seen as an independent nation.

Also, Parliament will be sitting during March and May, but MSPs may be available to travel to New York in June/July. They can be accredited to go as representatives through one of a number of NGOS.

Bill attends and participates as PNND at his own expense, Janet is accredited through WILPF (supported by several NGOs) and representatives from SCND have been accredited in the past.(More info on accreditation from Bill and Janet).

Implications of US Global relations for nuclear disarmament were discussed: Trump's presidency in America has repercussions for UK and Scotland as part of their international relations. It may be necessary to monitor the situation. The relationship between China and the US may also change and impact on the UK and Scotland.

Nuclear Disarmament campaigning is often seen as being a single issue campaign 'in our own bubble' and yet there is a general abhorrence of war on the part of the public when they see the evidence clearly, E.G. Aleppo and Yemen have recently captured the imagination of the public. We can use these opportunities to inform people and bring the case against nuclear weapons into the mainstream.

The Reaching Critical Will Monitor on international nuclear disarmament can also be widely promoted to people to keep up to date.

The Chatham House Research Paper, Nuclear Disarmament The Missing Link in Multilateralism (connections between nuclear weapons, climate change, food scarcity and conflict in vulnerable communities) advocates nuclear disarmament as essential in meeting the sustainable development goals. It could be summarised and publicised. This paper was commissioned by the Irish Government as part of the evidence for a ban treaty and shows the kind of work that Scotland could do. (Janet)

John Ainslie's paper, If Britain Fired Trident (John called it 'Flattening Moscow') could also be utilised. (It was an invited contribution to the 2013 Humanitarian Consequences Conference)

3. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UK

1)PCND

Bill: Defence, WMD are both reserved issues, collaboration with Parliamentary CND at Westminster is important. Janet has had contact with CND Parliamentary officer Russell Whiting and can occasionally attend PCND when on CND Council business. PCND is developing Parliamentary activity to raise awareness of the UN Ban Treaty before March. WQ on (convoys) and several EDMs on nuclear matters. Future PCND Meetings will take place on Wednesdays: January 11, February 8, March 8, April 19, May 10, June 14, July 12. Notes from their work can be circulated to members of the CPG on request. (Janet and Jenny)

2)ICAN uk

Janet also attended the ICAN UK meeting in London to report the Scottish perspective. New resources are available from them, mostly focussed on UK Parliamentary activity and a new campaigner's briefing from ICAN international will be available very soon.

4. SCOTTISH INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPPORTUNITIES

1)Parliamentary activity

In Scotland there is strong support for disarmament but we urgently need more action and awareness of international activity and the opportunities to push for change. Three key groups:

- the public
- other parliamentarians
- media

Ashley invited contributions to be published and events that could be promoted in Bella Caledonia. Constituents can raise Xparty business with MSPs and our civil society members can encourage and direct this. We all need to utilise social media and issue press releases, questions to the BBC. Hosting interesting and attractive events can attract public, media and encourage parliamentarians as well.

In light of Ireland's work on the Ban Treaty, and the Chatham House report, it was agreed to contact campaigners and politicians at Dail Eireann and possibly NI and Welsh Assemblies with a view to developing and sharing nuclear disarmament approaches. This could take the form of a meeting or meetings, or joint publications.

The timing of the NPT might enable participation by international diplomats or campaigners from outside Europe while they are already in Vienna. A lunchtime international meeting could be held either just before or just after the conference.

The UNA Conference on 9th December heard from Beatrice Fihn from ICAN, Dr Rebecca Johnston, Rob Edwards and Paul Wheelhouse MSP and was very well attended. Papers from the speakers will be a useful resource to inform future activity and keep in touch with those who attended.

2)Exhibitions

Veronika suggested a foyer Exhibition. This has a lead in time of over a year. Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre has been hosting community workshops to fold cranes and learn about Hiroshima; the aim is to fold a paper crane for every person who died at Hiroshima in the first year - 140,000 paper cranes as a Hiroshima memorial. This visually impressive body of work along with supporting material, including Scotland's opposition to nuclear weapons could be completed for Autumn 2018. John said that anyone suggesting that this would be a controversial topic could be referred to the recent hosting of the arms trade at Holyrood.(Brian, Jenny)

Smaller staffed displays can be booked for a week at a time inside the parliament and provide an opportunity to interact with parliamentarians and groups on 'guided tours' including school students.(contact Bill or Jenny)

UNA has already booked one of these from the 16 January for a week on the 3 pillars of the UN; Human Rights, Peace & Security and Global Development. Appropriate materials from the organisations represented at the ND X party group are welcome. (contact Gari)

3)Conferences

There will be a conference in Helensburgh, hosted by Helensburgh CND on the 11th February, focussing on the Faslane area after the nuclear weapons have gone.

4)Convoys

Thanks to Nukewatch and to SCND the Rob Edwards report and meetings (supported by ICAN) have been very useful in attracting attention. David reported Nukewatch have observed significant changes:

- there is sufficient increased frequency of travel to strongly suggest that upgrading activity in line with renewal is already under way.
- The number of members of the public who are aware of the convoy and putting pictures and comments into the public domain is increasing very rapidly in the age of social media One of the recent convoys was spotted and posted 5 times, each time by a member of the public.
- Nukewatch are currently looking at local authority response; risk assessment and public information, It is becoming clear that there are huge and worrying gaps.

5)Disinvestment

ICAN have a disinvestment programme which publishes an annual report on organisations which invest in nuclear weapons and campaigns to stop them.

The Don't Bank on the Bomb group in Scotland includes MEDACT, SCND, Quakers and the P&J centre, focussing on two strands,

- disinvestment in the RBS
- putting pressure on the Scottish Parliament regarding their pension investment in Nuclear weapons.

John would like to record that the parliamentary corporate body is being particularly obstructive on this. A change in policy would mean a 1% increase in the cost of the pension scheme. Brian drew attention to RBS investment in the Dakota Pipeline. Campaign Against The Arms Trade have been invited to get involved in the work of the ND X party Group since they have an interest and knowledge in this area, and they are considering if they have capacity to send a representative.

5.DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 18th January 12.30pm

Civil society members can share notifications and excerpts from these minutes with their own organisation. Agenda suggestions from civil society organisations to be emailed to Janet by Thursday 12th January 2.00pm Please also include a note about yourself and/or the organisation you represent.

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