

Bold action needed on nuclear weapons: An open letter from local, county, and state officials to President Joe Biden and the U.S. Congress

September 23, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
Washington, DC

Members of Congress
Washington, DC

Dear President Biden and Members of Congress:

We join together to urge bold action and U.S. leadership in the pursuit of global, verifiable nuclear disarmament and concrete policy steps to reduce and eliminate the severe danger nuclear weapons pose to each and every one of our constituents – and all of humanity.

Collectively, we celebrate the January 22, 2021 entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), an historic treaty signed by 86 nations and the first instrument of international law that comprehensively bans nuclear weapons in the same manner as biological and chemical weapons.

Nuclear weapons are the most horrific, destructive, inhumane weapons ever created. According to many scientists and public health experts, one nuclear bomb detonated over any one of the communities we represent – or anywhere in the world – could kill millions and wreak economic and environmental havoc. Even a limited nuclear war involving less than 1% of the world's nuclear arsenals could trigger worldwide climate disruption and a global famine that could put billions of people at risk. A large scale nuclear war would likely end modern civilization as we know it.

Over the past decades, the testing and production of nuclear weapons has caused tremendous death and suffering for thousands of people and scores of communities. Nearly \$70 billion of US tax dollars is spent annually to build and maintain nuclear weapons while \$1.7 trillion is proposed to be spent over the next 30 years to rebuild the entire nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons – robbing our country and communities of precious resources and taxpayer dollars needed to solve so many urgent human security problems, including responding to the global pandemic, correcting racial and economic injustice, and addressing climate change.

In our communities there are many life-threatening security challenges related to housing, jobs, transportation, food, health care and other issues that impact real people, our constituents, every day. Nuclear weapons do nothing to address them.

Current US nuclear weapons policies and funding are unconscionable - and fundamentally and deeply unjust as many leaders, from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to President Barack Obama have noted. In 1957, Dr. King said, "the development and use of nuclear weapons should be banned. It cannot be disputed that a full-scale nuclear war would be utterly catastrophic." In 2009, in his famous Prague speech, President Obama affirmed "America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." We urge you to reaffirm - and work together to realize - the Prague vision.

Our children and future generations deserve to live in a world of hope and promise - not one whose very existence could be annihilated in less than one hour. Setsuko Thurlow, a hibakusha and survivor of the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima said the following when accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN):

"Whenever I remember Hiroshima, the first image that comes to mind is of my four-year-old nephew, Eiji - his little body transformed into an unrecognizable melted chunk of flesh. He kept begging for water in a faint voice until his death released him from agony. To me, he came to represent all the innocent children of the world, threatened as they are at this very moment by nuclear weapons. Every second of every day, nuclear weapons endanger everyone we love and everything we hold dear."

Nine countries possessing nuclear weapons and a small handful of decision-makers in those countries have no right putting the lives, livelihoods and future well-being of 7.8 billion people at grave risk. In the United States we urge both the Executive branch and Congress to take immediate steps to reform current US policy. Indeed, many of us represent municipalities and states that have already adopted resolutions supporting five common sense policy solutions that serve as the centerpiece of the national Back from the Brink campaign:

- Actively pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals;
- Renounce the option of using nuclear weapons first;
- End the sole, unchecked authority of any president to launch a nuclear attack;
- Take U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert; and
- Cancel the plan to replace the entire US arsenal with enhanced weapons at a cost of more than \$1 trillion over the next 30 years.

This campaign has been endorsed by over 380 health, environmental, faith, peace, policy and justice organizations - including Physicians for Social Responsibility, Union of Concerned Scientists, Sierra Club, US Conference of Mayors, Indivisible, the Presbyterian Church, and the Hip Hop Caucus.

Our country and many of our constituents are seriously hurting, with millions of people out of work, thousands ill or dying from COVID, and the divide between rich and poor growing at an alarming rate. We should be investing in our communities, economic recovery, and public health preparedness, not spending hundreds of billions of dollars on new nuclear weapons that make us less safe and will only accelerate the global nuclear arms race.

It's time to take concrete steps toward a world free of the dangers of nuclear weapons. We and many of our constituents will support you every step of the way.

Sincerely,

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