

OVYM Statement on Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

Each of us and our Meetings are encouraged to contact our leaders about the urgent need to abolish nuclear weapons. Furthermore, we will send the following statement to the leaders listed in the last paragraph, to Quaker Yearly Meetings everywhere, and to members of the media in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio.

Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), who are part of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting, which consists of 19 Monthly Meetings in Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, follow early Quaker George Fox in that we seek to live in that “life and power that took away the occasion of all wars.” With Fox we seek to “come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.”

As a consequence of the preceding, Friends have worked for 350 years for an end to war. We have sought practical ways to achieve this end. Consequently we have long worked for disarmament through reduction of all kinds of weaponry and, in particular, for the elimination of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

In this statement, we speak to an issue that at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century has become particularly urgent. Herein, we beseech our leaders to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons on an accelerated time table.

The case for abolition in law and morality is widely recognized. For example, in 1996 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion that governments "must never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets." The Court held the threat or use of nuclear weapons to be generally illegal under humanitarian and other law. As such our nation's production and accumulations of nuclear weapons and repeated threats to use these weapons are violations of international law.

During the past few years, leaders who had formerly supported nuclear weapons have reconsidered. In 2008, a set of retired U.S. officials who in the past supported nuclear weapons (George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn) wrote that the U.S. needs to work for a nuclear-free world for the practical reason that they have become convinced that the very existence of these weapons is a danger to our country. These leaders and others offer detailed rationales, but the essence of their argument is that the very existence of these weapons: 1) encourages proliferation of weapons to previously non-nuclear states thereby increasing the risk of nuclear war between states and 2) increases the opportunity for terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons.

These arguments are convincing to all those who, like Quakers, seek an end to war. We believe they should also be convincing to those who simply want our nation to be safe and secure.

We urge our President, the Secretary of State, the ambassador to the United Nations, and our congresspersons to work vigorously for a rapid abolition of nuclear weapons. Although we applaud the U.S. Senate's 2010 ratification of the New START disarmament treaty between the U.S. and Russia, we urge deeper cuts in the number of weapons in future treaties. As essential steps to a safer world, we ask our U.S. Senators to finally ratify the Nuclear Nonproliferation and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaties. We ask our Senators to prayerfully consider the danger to peoples of our own country and the World of failing to ratify these treaties.