

CHECK OUT

CCJP

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Sixth Myths about Nuclear Weapons

Myth 1

Nuclear weapons are not much worse than other big bombs

Reality

Nuclear weapons are unique. No other weapon, even biological or chemical weapons, come close to causing the destruction and suffering inflicted by a single nuclear weapon. The International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its 1996 advisory opinion that nuclear weapons are generally illegal, stated, "The destructive power of nuclear weapons cannot be contained in either space or time. They have the potential to destroy all civilisation and the entire ecosystem of the planet."

There are two threats to the planet as we know it – climate change and nuclear weapons. We must address both.



Myth 2.

The nuclear weapons problem declined with the end of the Cold War

Reality.

The opportunity presented by the end of the Cold War to drastically reduce reliance on military force and nuclear weapons has been squandered. In its place a dangerous complacency has set in. While the number of nuclear weapons has dropped from its Cold War peak of around 70,000 weapons to the current total of 27,000 (96% of them in the US and Russia), nuclear dangers remain high.

The risk of accidental nuclear war has increased as command and control systems in Russia deteriorate and over 4,000 weapons in the US and Russia remain on high alert. The number of nuclear weapons states has increased to nine (Russia, the US, France, the UK, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea). Policies for the use of the weapons have changed, with the US, France and the UK all announcing since September 2001 that they are prepared to use their weapons against terrorist threats.

Myth 3

Nuclear deterrence kept the peace during the Cold War

Reality

The Cold War was not a time of "peace". Generations grew up with the ever-present threat of nuclear war. Nuclear weapons did not prevent the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, the Falklands or Iraq. (Nor did they prevent the attacks on the world's most powerful nation in September 2001.) General Lee Butler, head of the US Strategic Air Command from 1992 to 1994, states that nuclear weapons "unnecessarily prolonged and intensified the Cold War".

Robert McNamara, former US Secretary of Defence, now an ardent advocate for nuclear weapons abolition, states that we were "a hair's breadth from disaster" during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and that there were huge miscalculations on both sides

Myth 4

Some nuclear weapons states are responsible and trustworthy

Reality

No nuclear weapons state can claim to be trustworthy with these weapons, least of all the only nation that has ever used them.

Possession of nuclear weapons represents a threat to use them, and this is morally, politically and legally unacceptable. At the ICJ in 1996, Mexico's Ambassador Sergio Gonzalez Galvez, said "Torture is not a permissible response to torture. Nor is mass rape acceptable retaliation to mass rape. Just as unacceptable is retaliatory deterrence – You burn my city, I will burn yours".

The mere possession of nuclear weapons is grossly irresponsible also because it provokes other nations to acquire them.



Myth 5

It is utopian to believe we can get rid of nuclear weapons

Reality

On the contrary, it is utopian to believe that we can continue to live in a heavily nuclear armed world without these weapons being used again. Repeatedly, high level reports have warned that unless nuclear weapons are abolished, they will be used. The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons reported that "The proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity and never used - accidentally or by decision - defies credibility."

Humanity has outlawed other inhumane practices or weapons, such as apartheid, slavery, biological and chemical weapons and landmines. We must outlaw nuclear weapons. There are no overwhelming technical obstacles. It is a matter of building the political will. The role of civil society is central to this.

Myth 6

Nuclear disarmament is yesterday's issue. We've moved on

Reality

Yes, the goal of nuclear disarmament has been around since 1945. But the goal must be fulfilled, not abandoned. The abolition of slavery took decades of tireless campaigning (and still vigilance against the evil of slavery in its various forms is needed).

A new campaign, ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, was initiated in Australia and launched here and internationally in 2007. ICAN's goal is a Nuclear Weapons Convention, a treaty to prohibit the development, testing, production, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. Already there is significant high level support from around the world for the campaign.

It is a campaign of hope. Can you imagine a world without nuclear weapons? I CAN. Find out how you can join the campaign at www.ICANw.org.