

nuclear risks on rise, Canadians must fight for disarmament

Posted by Joan Russow

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By Tamara Lorincz August 8, 2019 A U.S. Ohio-class nuclear-armed submarine can carry enough nuclear warheads to wipe 24 cities off the map.

TAMARA LORINCZ

Cities across Canada held commemorations this week to mark the 74th anniversary of the tragic atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Lantern ceremonies, peace walks and vigils for nuclear disarmament were held in Victoria, Nanaimo, Salt Spring, Castlegar, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto and Montreal.

There are 108 Canadian cities that are part of Mayors for Peace, an international movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The mayor of Hiroshima started Mayors for Peace in 1982 and today there are 7,785 member cities worldwide.

Montreal is an executive member of Mayors for Peace and a twin city of Hiroshima. In 1998, Hiroshima gave Montreal a peace bell, which has been placed in the city's beautiful botanical gardens and is rung every year in a ceremony on Aug. 5.

Cities do not want to be targets of a nuclear weapons attack. When the Japanese cities were bombed in 1945 by the United States, they were reduced to rubble and over 200,000 people were killed. The nuclear weapons that exist today are 3,000 times more powerful and can be launched within minutes.

There are nine countries that possess approximately 14,000 nuclear weapons according to the Federation of American Scientists. The U.S. and Russia maintain most of these weapons of mass destruction, including over 3,200 deployed strategic warheads. More than 1,800 American, Russian, British and French warheads are on high alert. A single nuclear warhead, if detonated on a large city, would kill millions of people. Hospitals, houses and schools would be destroyed and the radioactive contamination would persist for decades.

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Regrettably, the risk of an intentional or accidental launch of a nuclear weapon is the highest it has been since the height of the Cold War. At the beginning of this month, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was terminated by the United States and Russia. This important 1987 arms control treaty banned all land-based missiles in the range of 500 to 5,500 kilometres between these two countries.

Moreover, all the nuclear weapons countries are modernizing their arsenals, leading many analysts to fear a new nuclear arms race. Earlier this year, the U.S. Congressional Budget Office estimated that the American government will spend over \$494 billion to upgrade all aspects of its nuclear weapons system over the next 10 years, which is more than every other country combined. Consequently, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has set the Doomsday Clock to two minutes to midnight, the closest the world has been to a nuclear catastrophe.

Civil society groups are working hard to bring us back from the brink. In 2017, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), a network of non-governmental organizations, won the Nobel Peace Prize for its work on the landmark United Nations' Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). It was a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing and a Canadian citizen, Setsuko Thurlow, who accepted the prize on behalf of ICAN.

Alongside Thurlow at the peace ceremony in Toronto this past Tuesday, Canadian activist Ray Acheson gave the keynote address. Acheson is the director of Reaching Critical Will, the New York City-based disarmament program of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She said that nuclear weapons are the most indiscriminate and inhumane explosive devices and their elimination is a humanitarian imperative.

Toronto, Canada's largest city of five million people, joined the ICAN Cities Appeal last year alongside Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Berlin, Paris, Manchester, Oslo, Geneva, Melbourne, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. These cities are urging to their national governments to sign on to the TPNW and create a nuclear-weapons free world.

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Currently, there are 25 countries that have ratified the treaty including Mexico and New Zealand and it is half way to coming into force. Unfortunately, Canada has refused to join this crucial, comprehensive treaty because of pressure from the U.S. and our membership in NATO.

Disarmament, not deterrence, is the path to genuine security and peace. It's time for the Canadian government to heed the call of its cities and citizens and join the global movement to ban the bomb.

Halifax native Tamara Lorincz is a board member, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, and a PhD candidate, Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Halifax Mayor Mike Savage quietly joined Mayors for Peace in 2014.