

IPB CONDEMNS UK DECISION TO INCREASE WARHEADS BY 40%

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IPB shares the widespread international denunciation of the announcement by Prime Minister Boris Johnson that Britain will increase the cap on the number of its nuclear warheads to 260. Previously, Britain had been committed to reducing its stockpile to no more than 180 Trident warheads by the mid-2020s. However, the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy published yesterday included this 40% increase in the stockpile.

This position reverses Britain's longstanding trend of cutting back on its nuclear arsenal and its stated commitments to non-proliferation, disarmament and international security. It is a very destabilising move at a time when the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists stands at 100 seconds to Armageddon (the closest it has ever been) for the second year running. In an additional backward step, the government will also stop publishing information on the number of warheads and missiles in operation, adding to the uncertainty and suspicion surrounding their possession.

While the UK nuclear arsenal is small compared to those of the US and Russia, it is a very substantial increase and will only encourage the other nuclear weapons states (both 'friends' and 'adversaries') to increase their nuclear numbers and/or adopt more aggressive postures. It will also further marginalise disarmament efforts, which only weeks ago were given a major boost by the entry into force of the Nuclear Ban Treaty and the start of talks between the US and Russia to attempt to extend the New START treaty. In addition, the announcement represents a clear violation of Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and will undermine the next Review Conference which is just a few months away.

The allocation of yet more of taxpayers' money to such a nuclear fantasy at a time when the public purse is stretched to the limit coping with the pandemic and its economic effects, is baffling, as well as insulting to all those in dire need of financial support. Just weeks ago, Prime Minister Johnson was saying that there was not enough money to feed children during the school holidays and only last week the government refused to offer more than a derisory 1% salary increase to nurses. Also, the money allocated by the British government to fight climate change (in the year in which it will host the COP 26 talks) are dwarfed by this greatly-inflated military budget.

Finally, the decision flies in the face of mounting evidence that this is not what the British people want to see as cities across Britain, including Manchester, Edinburgh, Oxford, Norwich and Leeds, have signed up to support the Ban Treaty's

International Peace Bureau (HQ)

Marienstr. 19-20
10117 Berlin
+49 (0)30 12084549
info@ipb-office.berlin
www.ipb.org

IPB Geneva Office

Maison Internationale des
Associations
15 rue des Savoises
Box 30
1205 Geneva
Switzerland

GCOMS Coordination Office

Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la
Pau
C/. Erasme de Janer 8,
entresol, despatx 9,
08001 Barcelona
Spain
coordination.gcoms@ipb.org

implementation. Top religious leaders and a range of celebrities have openly endorsed the Treaty and called on the UK government to change its stance. According to a new poll commissioned by CND, 59% of the UK public think that Britain should sign up to the Treaty, while 77% support a total global nuclear weapons ban.

The UK government seems to have learnt nothing from the experiences of the pandemic and the warnings of the Doomsday Clock, which highlight the need for international cooperation and understanding and moves towards a common security. Instead, they are heading towards constructing fortress Britain which will not improve national security but will increase international tensions.

IPB calls on the UK Parliament to reject this dangerous new policy and replace it with an approach based on human security and on intensified international cooperation to bring closer a nuclear-free world.