

Statement towards a Nuclear-free World

Statement towards a nuclear free world, adopted as part of the Report of the Public Issues Committee by the World Council of Churches Central Committee.

07 July 2014

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in a region where nuclear explosions, accidents and threats have taken a heavy toll. Northeast Asia is the only place on earth where nuclear weapons have been used in warfare. During the Cold War more than 1,000 nuclear bombs were tested in adjoining areas of the Pacific and Asia. Today all states in the region either possess nuclear weapons or depend on the US nuclear arsenal. The 100-plus nuclear power plants in East Asia and the many more planned are signs of economic prowess but also reminders of the Fukushima tragedy. South Korea has the highest geographic concentration of nuclear power plants in the world.

Living in proximity to nuclear power plants and in the target zones of opposing nuclear forces, people of conscience and courage in Northeast Asia are raising serious questions about the military and economic path of their societies. Before and after the Busan Assembly, ecumenical and inter-religious conferences in Japan, Korea, USA and Europe have called variously for replacing nuclear power in the region as a step toward sustainable development, and eliminating nuclear weapons as a step toward peace.[\[i\]](#)

Nuclear weapons cannot indeed be reconciled with real peace. They inflict unspeakable suffering with blast, heat and radiation. They wreak destruction which cannot be bound by space or time. Their power is indiscriminate and their effects cannot be matched by any other device. As long as nuclear weapons exist, they pose a threat to humanity.

Cities are the main targets of nuclear weapons. Attacking cities with 100 small, Hiroshima-size bombs would kill some 20 million people outright and cause two or three times that number of casualties over time. Soot from the incinerated cities would be lofted into the upper atmosphere, disrupting the global climate. For a decade, colder temperatures and shorter growing seasons would put two billion people at risk of starvation.[\[ii\]](#)

In the face of such data, 124 governments declared in 2013 that “It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.”[\[iii\]](#) Nuclear strategy, however, demands an unequivocal commitment to use the weapons and nuclear history is rife with accidents, miscalculations and near-disasters.[\[iv\]](#) What is more, even one nuclear detonation would overwhelm the emergency services of any country in the world.[\[v\]](#) The only way to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again is to eliminate the weapons themselves.

The related technology of nuclear energy is a peculiarly hazardous form of development. The Fukushima Daiichi disaster in 2011 has demonstrated once more the threats it poses to people, community life and natural ecosystems. Tens of thousands of the people displaced by the disaster will never be allowed to go home. Their farms, villages and cities stand empty, contaminated. The

disaster's full impact on public health and the environment will never be known. A complete clean-up is impossible.

Victims of Fukushima are now referred to as *hibakusha*, a term that connotes suffering, social stigma and an unnatural fate. The term was first used to describe people struck by the atomic bombings in Japan.

2015 is the 70th anniversary of those bombings. The *hibakusha* of 1945 still bear witness in the hope that no one else will ever suffer their fate. They are now joined by the *hibakusha* of 2011 who decry nuclear power. It is right that Christians and churches listen to them and make their witness our own.

Health, humanitarian and environmental concerns

Military and civilian uses of nuclear technology both produce large quantities of poisonous materials that do not exist in nature and are among the world's worst forms of environmental contamination. Some of the by-products pose a threat to living things for millions of years.^[vi] No known options for long-term storage or disposal of nuclear waste are capable of isolating nuclear waste from the environment for the timeframe of its inherent hazards.^[vii]

By fuelling our economies with nuclear power and protecting ourselves with nuclear weapons, we are poisoning the earth and generating risks for ourselves, our descendants and other living things.

Nuclear radiation is a poison that cannot be seen, smelled or tasted. Its health effects are severe and multi-generational. Isotopes released by nuclear power plants may contaminate the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. They are radioactively and chemically toxic to the human body.

The effects of ionizing radiation are observable early in a nuclear disaster in the psychological and social traumas that tear at families and communities. With time, increased risks of a variety of cancers also emerge and permanent genetic damage becomes apparent.

The use of the term "safe" for the nuclear industry has proven to be unsupportable. Serious accidents that were judged to be highly unlikely have occurred repeatedly.^[viii] The grave consequences of such accidents have been routinely ignored or dismissed by the governments and corporations involved.

Setting "acceptable" levels for exposure to the ionizing radiation and chemical toxins released during nuclear accidents and nuclear tests has proved to be misleading and dangerous. After Chernobyl, Fukushima and other accidents, the "acceptable" level of contamination was simply raised in order to minimize the perceived seriousness of the event and to deflect public criticism.

Similar policies prevail around nuclear test sites. Local inhabitants were routinely told by the foreigners using their land that they had nothing to fear from radioactive fallout. Sometimes they were not even told to leave high-risk areas. In many reported cases, military doctors sent to study the effects of radiation were authorized to examine the test victims but not to provide medical care.

The adverse impact of nuclear substances on communities around nuclear test sites continues to this day.[\[ix\]](#)

In recent decades, new humanitarian norms have been built against chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, laser weapons, landmines and cluster munitions. The show of resolve by leading nuclear powers to eradicate Syria's chemical weapons is both a case in point and a precedent for further action.

Achieving a similar, humanitarian ban on the world's most powerful weapon will be difficult. Nuclear-armed states appear to be flouting majority concerns by emphasizing the continued importance of nuclear weapons, modernizing their arsenals for many more decades of use and minimizing the Non-Proliferation Treaty obligation to negotiate effective measures for nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, a new global constituency for abolition is transforming nuclear debate. Governments, international organizations, civil society campaigns and religious networks are delegitimizing nuclear weapons on the basis of their health, humanitarian and environmental consequences. The legitimacy and prestige ascribed to nuclear weapons is eroding as a result.

Ecumenical discernment in nuclear affairs

The World Council of Churches has consistently emphasized the need to engage in ethical reflection and advocacy on nuclear weapons and nuclear energy from the standpoint of justice, participation and sustainability. The WCC First Assembly in 1948 declared war with "atomic" and other modern weapons "a sin against God and a degradation of man". Church policies have addressed nuclear dangers ever since.

The Fifth Assembly in 1975 warned of "ethical dilemmas" raised by nuclear power generation and nuclear weapons, the hazards of waste storage, and the spread of nuclear technology.[\[x\]](#) The 1979 World Conference on Faith, Science and the Future also warned that nuclear power could not play a significant long-term role in reducing CO2 emissions, called for a moratorium on nuclear power plant construction and urged a major shift towards renewable energy.[\[xi\]](#)

The Sixth Assembly in 1983 called for "an international legal instrument that would outlaw as a crime against humanity the possession as well as the use of nuclear arms". Ecumenical concerns three years later during the Chernobyl disaster may be read forward into the Fukushima crisis today: the safety of nuclear workers; the pattern of official silence about well-founded risks; and the denial of citizens' right to information about personal harm.

The WCC Consultation on Nuclear Energy in 1989 noted that "Human actions often violate the integrity of creation and today endanger its very survival," and recommended three ethical principles for energy technologies which are valid in assessing nuclear energy today: (a) the responsibility to future generations to promote the "sustainability of creation", (b) justice as enabling human survival and fulfilment; and (c) participation of people in energy choices which directly affect their lives."[\[xii\]](#)

The 2009 WCC Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt addresses concerns relevant to both military and civilian uses of nuclear energy: the concept of "ecological debt" which applies to

populations affected by the manufacture, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons and by the “nuclear winter” and famine which a nuclear conflict may cause; the “era of unlimited consumption” which is fuelled in part by nuclear energy; and economic and ecological findings which deny claims that nuclear power is safe, cheap and reliable.

The 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica reaffirmed the WCC call for “total nuclear disarmament”. It declared that the Fukushima disaster of 2011 “has proven once again that we must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy.”

The 2013 WCC Assembly in South Korea said that “shared human security must become a greater priority on the Korean peninsula than divisive, competitive and militarized security” and called for the elimination of nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons in North East Asia.[\[xiii\]](#)

Ecumenical advocacy against nuclear dangers is shaped by the worldwide engagement of member churches. From Canada to India, from Japan to Australia, from Germany to the Marshall Islands, churches resist the construction of nuclear power stations, protest against the presence of nuclear weapons and support communities affected by uranium mining, nuclear tests and nuclear disasters. In many of these struggles, there is cooperation with people of other faiths.

The WCC central committee recognizes that there are churches still journeying with the difficult subject of nuclear energy and acknowledges that there are churches who will have a different process, depending on their context, for addressing the issue of nuclear energy.

Church leaders in three African countries were catalysts in bringing the African Nuclear–Weapon–Free Zone into effect in 2009, fulfilling a WCC Assembly recommendation in 2006. An ecumenical advocacy network convened by the WCC helped to ensure that the Arms Trade Treaty of 2013 has humanitarian and human rights criteria, pursuant to a WCC central committee decision in 2011. In keeping with a recommendation from Busan, churches on six continents are engaged in coordinated ecumenical advocacy towards a humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons.

Stewardship of creation and management of risks

Christians are called to share in the responsibility to safeguard God’s creation and protect the sanctity of life. Responsible and inclusive stewardship of energy today must take greater account of the common good, the integrity of creation and humanity’s future. Energy sources must be safe, efficient and renewable. Energy conservation must be an integral part of energy use. Present uses must not create serious problems for the future. Today’s energy must be suitable, in effect, to serve as tomorrow’s energy as well.

Despite decades of scrutiny, nuclear energy has not met such requirements. It is not renewable and not based on a sustainable resource. Carbon is emitted throughout the nuclear fuel chain – from mining, processing, transportation, construction and operations to decommissioning and the perpetual management of toxic nuclear waste. Claims that nuclear energy is clean and environmentally–friendly appear to ignore its overall impact, its consequences and its alternatives.

Nuclear energy has also proved to be unaffordable, particularly when government subsidies and the transfer of liability to citizens are included, and the incalculable costs of long-term nuclear waste management are acknowledged. A full reckoning of affordability must also include both direct and indirect subsidies, liabilities in case of disaster, and safe decommissioning. Some of these costs are hidden; some continue indefinitely. Compared to other energy sources, nuclear plants also require heavy capital investment.^[xiv] Large governmental subsidies for nuclear power typically far surpass government support for renewable energy technologies.^[xv]

Large expenditures of public funds are also a conspicuous feature of nuclear weapons programs. Each year nuclear-armed states spend about \$100 billion on their nuclear forces. Current plans for weapons upgrades, renewals and extensions total \$500 billion or more in the Euro-Atlantic region alone. These public billions are a vast source of revenue for private enterprises including corporations also involved in nuclear energy. About 300 banks, financial institutions and pension funds in 30 countries invest in 27 corporations with nuclear weapons-related contracts. Their holdings in 2013 totalled \$314 billion.^[xvi]

Nuclear energy use is laden with risks which are difficult to manage. The probability of a nuclear disaster may be relatively low but the consequences of a disaster range from very high to unthinkable. The risk, therefore, is high.

Many governments have made the responsible decision to avoid such risks entirely. Following the Fukushima disaster, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Mexico and Taiwan shut down, stopped building or pledged to eventually phase-out nuclear power plants. Other states renewed their resolve to rely on non-nuclear energy sources and to reject nuclear armaments.

Governments that subsidize nuclear power plants are simultaneously accepting risks and exposing their publics to those risks. They use public monies to subsidize an industry which private capital shuns because of its inherent risks. In addition to multi-billion-dollar subsidies, governments grant the industry exemptions from liability in case of a nuclear accident or disaster. The total economic loss from the Fukushima disaster, for example, is estimated to be US\$250-500 billion.^[xvii]

To deploy nuclear weapons is to embrace what is arguably the greatest intentional risk in human history. First, the government involved must maintain a credible threat to use its weapons. Second, it must rely on its enemies' risk management to avoid being attacked. Third, it must stand ready to abandon its own risk management if attacked. Its adversaries embrace the same contradictions. The fate of the earth has hung by the thread of this bizarre gamble for a lifetime. Surely, to persist in such a gamble makes a mockery of our Creator.

In spite of treaties and agreements, the proliferation of nuclear weapons remains a continuous risk. While the number of nuclear warheads has been reduced since the Cold War, the overall trend among nuclear-armed states is to modernize rather than eliminate their nuclear arsenals. Also, the number of countries with nuclear weapons capability has increased. In fact, simply having a nuclear weapons program has proved to be a powerful tool in international affairs, even for a small country.

Security and opportunity links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons

Nuclear power is the pathway to acquiring the equipment, materials and technology necessary for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Promoted as “atoms for peace” and “peaceful uses of nuclear energy”, the expansion of nuclear power has facilitated the spread of nuclear weapons. The civilian use of nuclear power can hide military intentions and tempt countries to reprocess plutonium from nuclear waste for use in nuclear weapons. Countries with different levels of technical sophistication can use reactor-grade plutonium for nuclear warheads.

Civilian and military nuclear facilities are potential targets for acts of terrorism or war. Radioactive material may be stolen or sold, and used with conventional explosives to make a ‘dirty’ bomb.

Since more than 400 nuclear power plants are in operation worldwide and 15 countries rely on them for a quarter of their electricity or more, it will take time to replace nuclear power. However, cheaper, safer and more sustainable alternatives are available. The first is conservation. It is estimated that a quarter of all current energy production could be saved through conservation measures – far more than the amount now generated by nuclear power. Energy savings are the most accessible, the least expensive, and the safest alternative to nuclear energy.

Phasing out nuclear reactors and eliminating nuclear arsenals will present other opportunities as well – to expand renewable energy, to support communities where nuclear-related jobs are lost, to promote new, environmentally responsible businesses, to cease production of dangerous nuclear substances, and to remove nuclear threats from international relations. It would also offer the opportunity – like the climate crisis – to demonstrate that good governance and human flourishing in the 21st century require a coherent realignment of national and international self-interest.

Nuclear exodus as pilgrimage of justice and peace

God is a generous Creator, calling life into being from atoms and molecules and endowing creation with life in abundance. To split the atom into deadly, unnatural elements already gives cause for serious ethical and theological reflection. To use the energy of the atom in ways that threaten and destroy life is a sinful misuse of God’s creation.

We are called to live in ways that protect life instead of putting it at risk – neither living fearfully, defended by nuclear weapons, nor living wastefully, dependent on nuclear energy. We are invited to build communities and economies in harmony with God’s manifold gifts and promises of life.

In the 1990s, when the Sahtu-Dene people of northern Canada learned that uranium from their lands had been used in the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, they sent a delegation of elders to Japan to apologize. We too have such a witness: to judge armaments and energy use by their effects on people and on God’s creation; to confess that our desire for material comfort and convenience insulates us from concern for the source and quantity of the energy we consume; to abandon all support for retaining nuclear weapons and refuse to accept that the mass destruction of other peoples can be a legitimate form of protection for ourselves.

The voices of the *hibakusha*, *pi-pok-ja* (Korean atomic bomb sufferers) and test site victims cry out for an exodus from the nuclear age. We must listen to all who suffer nuclear harm – those whose

bodies are deformed by genetic mutations, whose lands and seas are poisoned by nuclear tests, whose farms and cities are fouled by nuclear accidents, whose work in mines and power plants exposes them to radiation.

God delivers us from evil including nuclear evil. Confronted with the possible destruction of creation, God opened the covenant to include all of creation (Genesis 9). The Spirit of God sustains all creation (Psalm 104). Exploitation of people and destruction of creation go hand in hand (Isaiah 23). God's word guides us toward the divine presence and purpose in creation, warns us not to interfere with creation's goodness, and reminds us that all of creation is worthy of wonder, celebration and praise.

God sets before us life and death, blessings and curses. God implores us, "Now choose life", so that we and our children may live (Deuteronomy 30). The Busan Assembly was reminded that God's "now" is imminent, is eschatological time, a time of *metanoia* and full of grace. As churches we must educate ourselves to choose life by turning from the blinding flash of nuclear warheads and the deadly glow of nuclear reactors to healthy sources of energy in the natural world within which we have our being – sun, wind, water and geo-thermal energy. This is the path of exodus from nuclear and other dangers.

"We have enjoyed the sweetness of plentiful energy through nuclear energy; now we must learn the bitterness of closing nuclear reactors and dealing with radioactive waste," said a Korean Christian declaration of faith prior to the Busan Assembly. "We urgently proclaim the need not for the security of the status quo of nuclear-armed states but for the securing of life for all humanity and creation."[\[xviii\]](#)

God has prepared a path for us toward life, justice and peace and away from self-destruction, violence and war.[\[xix\]](#) In that spirit the 10th Assembly invited churches worldwide to join and strengthen an Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The World Council of Churches central committee, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 2–8 July 2014, therefore calls on member churches and related ministries and networks to:

1. ***Sustain and deepen*** ethical and theological discussions about civilian and military uses of nuclear energy, seeking discernment on what purposes they serve, how much they actually cost, whose interests they serve, what rights they violate, their impact on health and the environment, and whether there is a witness inherent in using nuclear electricity or in accepting protection from nuclear arms;
2. ***Develop and practice*** ecologically sensitive spirituality to guide transformative changes in individual and community lifestyles; ***make*** positive changes in energy consumption, efficiency, conservation, and the use of energy from renewable sources; and ***build*** on the experience of environmentally conscious churches in the WCC;
3. ***Practice and promote*** divestment from businesses and financial institutions involved in the production of nuclear weapons or nuclear power plants and related exports, and ***advocate*** for the reallocation of government spending from nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants to

the development of renewable energy and the redevelopment of communities where nuclear industries are closing;

4. **Support** rehabilitation, pastoral accompaniment, legal action and compensation of losses for the victims of nuclear accidents and nuclear tests including survivors of the Fukushima disaster in Japan and victims of nuclear tests in the Pacific; similarly, **support** the lawsuit filed by the Marshall Islands against the nuclear-armed states at the International Court of Justice;
5. **Call on** their governments to join inter-governmental initiatives, and affirm civil society endeavours, to ban the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law and in fulfilment of existing international obligations;
6. **Join** ecumenical advocacy networks collaborating with civil society, churches and other religious organizations in open, participatory alliances such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN);
7. **Support** specific steps towards the long-standing ecumenical goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula, including a moratorium on military exercises and the negotiation of collective regional security agreements to replace nuclear deterrence;
8. **Oppose** the expansion of military bases, nuclear forces and missile defences in Asia or targeting Asia, and raise awareness of public resistance to such military expansion including the new naval base at Gangjeong Village on Jeju Island, Republic of Korea.

The central committee calls on member churches, related ministries and networks to engage in coordinated national and international advocacy with the WCC to:

1. **Urge** the 31 states without nuclear weapons – which call for nuclear disarmament but depend on the nuclear forces of the United States – to actively support the elimination of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law, remove all nuclear weapons from their territory and negotiate collective, non-nuclear, security agreements;
2. **Promote** new nuclear-weapon-free zones, particularly in Northeast Asia and the Middle East, and steps to strengthen existing zones in Southeast Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and Africa against any presence or threat from nuclear weapons;
3. **Urge** governments to phase-out nuclear power plants and reform overall energy use to increase energy efficiency and conservation, reduce carbon emissions and toxic waste, and develop renewable energy resources;
4. **Organize** coherent and inter-disciplinary actions consistent with these recommendations as contributions to the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

END NOTES

[i] Member church and related ecumenical and inter-religious conference statements raising nuclear issues in the lead-up to, and after, the WCC Assembly in Busan:

- *Declaration of the International Conference on the East Japan Disaster, “Resisting the Myth of Safe Nuclear Energy: The Fundamental Question from Fukushima”*, United Church of Christ in Japan, Sendai, March 2014.
- *A Call for Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula: Ecumenical Korea Peace Statement*, United Methodist Church et al, Atlanta, May 2013
- *A Joint Statement on Peace in the Korean Peninsula*, Presbyterian Church in Korea–Presbyterian Church USA, Louisville, April 2013
- *Sang–Saeng: Living Together in Justice and Peace*, Pre–Assembly Nuclear Advocacy Consultation Working Paper, WCC–ecumenical–interfaith, Seoul, December 2012
- *No to Nuclear Power! Faith Declaration from Fukushima*, National Council of Churches in Japan, Fukushima, December 2012
- *Christians for a Nuclear–free Earth*, ecumenical statement, Tokyo, May 2012
- *Faith Declaration for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy*, Korean Network for a World Free of Nuclear Power and Weapons, Seoul, March 2012
- *For a World without Nuclear Power Plants*, Anglican Church in Japan, Kyoto, May 2012
- Asia Inter–Religious Conferences on Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution, three conference statements: Okinawa, 2012; Seoul, 2010; Tokyo, 2008
- *For a World of Peace, a World Free of Nuclear Weapons*, ecumenical Korean–international statement, 2010

[ii] *Self–assured destruction: The climate impacts of nuclear war*, Alan Robock and Owen Brian, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2012, <http://climate.envsci.rutgers.edu/pdf/RobockToonSAD.pdf>

[iii] *Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons*, 68th Session, UN General Assembly, 2013, http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com13/statements/21Oct_Joint.pdf

[iv] *Command and Control*, by Eric Schlosser, Allen Lane, 2013

[v] *Nuclear Famine: Two Billion People at Risk*, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 2013, <http://www.ippnw.org/pdf/nuclear-famine-two-billion-at-risk-2013.pdf>

[vi] See background paper, *Timeframe of Care*, Mary Lou Harley, United Church of Canada

[vii] *Final Study: Choosing a Way Forward*, Canadian Nuclear Waste Management Organization, 2005, <http://www.nwmo.ca/studyreport>

[viii] International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. International Atomic Energy Agency, <http://www-ns.iaea.org/tech-areas/emergency/ines.asp>

[ix] *Report of the Special Rapporteur* (Calin Georgescu), Human Rights Council, Geneva, 3 September 2012

[x] *Breaking Barriers*, Official Report of the Fifth Assembly, WCC, 1975, p. 128

[xi] *Faith and Science in an Unjust World, Vol. II*, WCC, 1979, p. 90

[xii] *Church and Society Working Group Report*, World Council of Churches Consultation on Nuclear Energy, Kinshasa, Zaire, 1989

[xiii] *Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula*, 10th Assembly, World Council of Churches, 2013, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/peace-and-reunification-of-the-korean-peninsula>

[xiv] For example, in the US, a dollar invested in energy efficiency can deliver five times more electricity than nuclear power. Investments in wind energy can produce 100-times more electricity. *Fukushima and the Future of Nuclear Power*, Green Cross International, 2011, http://www.gcint.org/sites/default/files/article/files/GCI_Perspective_Nuclear_Power_20110411.pdf

[xv] *Ibid*; in the US, the ratio was ten to one in 2009—\$55 billion for nuclear, \$5.5 billion for solar and wind energy.

[xvi] www.dontbankonthebomb.org

[xvii] *Costs and Consequences of Fukushima*, Physicians for Social Responsibility, <http://www.psr.org/environment-and-health/environmental-health-policy-institute/responses/costs-and-consequences-of-fukushima.html>

[xviii] *Faith Declaration for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy*, Seoul, Republic of Korea, March 2012

[xix] *Exodus to a New Earth*, Peace Plenary, WCC 10th Assembly in *Ecumenical Review*, December 2013, p. 484.