



NFLA media release, 17th March 2021

NFLA sees UK Defence Review as seriously threatening 30 years of gradual nuclear disarmament and opposes increase in Trident warheads

The UK & Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) note the UK Government's publication of its Integrated Strategic Defence Review today, which seeks to pivot the UK from centralising its policy within Europe and more towards a 'global arena', particularly the Asia-Pacific region.

Whilst NFLA will consider the report in its totality, of particular concern to us, as it has been to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), is the potential increase in the cap of the UK's nuclear weapons arsenal. This could reverse Britain's long-standing principles and commitments to non-proliferation, disarmament and international security. (1)

In Parliament yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer also focused on this issue, saying: "This review breaks the goal of successive prime ministers and cross-party efforts to reduce our nuclear stockpile. It doesn't explain, when, why, or for what strategic purpose."

The UK's Integrated Review abandons the UK's previous commitment of a cap of operational nuclear warheads set at 120, and it raises the overall cap on the UK's stockpile from 180 to 260 - an increase of more than 40%. The UK says the move is necessary due to the "evolving security environment" without giving any evidence how more nuclear warheads will protect British citizens. According to defence sources speaking to 'The Guardian' the decision to lift the UK's Trident warhead cap by over 40% was motivated by a desire to be more assertive about nuclear weapons: "If we have them, let's not apologise for it, let's own it," an insider told the newspaper. (2)

In a different statement, the UK Foreign Minister Dominic Raab has commented, on the 50th anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, that the UK Government remain committed to the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. (3) The decision on not reducing the cap on Trident missiles does not suggest that, in tone as much as in reality. With the crucial 5 yearly Review Conference taking place in the summer NFLA would question whether this shows the UK Government as "working in good faith" to prevent proliferation and accomplish the elimination of all nuclear weapons anytime soon.

It also remains a disappointing move when the majority of UN member states are in the process of ratifying or supporting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which became a part of the international disarmament regime in January.

As part of this campaign it should be noted that:

- Major international banks and financial institutions are divesting from nuclear weapons production, informed by ICAN's "Don't Bank on the Bomb" campaign. A number of Scottish Councils like Renfrewshire, Midlothian, West Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde have passed resolutions supporting divestment in this area from Council Pension Funds.
- A number of Councils across Britain, including Manchester, Edinburgh, Oxford, Brighton and Hove, Norwich and Leeds, have also signed up to support the TPNW. Other Councils will follow.
- Since October 2020, Anglican and Catholic leaders in the UK and a range of faith leaders and prominent opinion formers have openly endorsed the TPNW and called on the UK government to change its stance towards it.
- 59% of the UK public think that the UK should sign up to the TPNW, while 77% support a total global nuclear weapons ban, according to recent polling by Survation for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR & RENEWABLE ENERGY ISSUES



NFLA also note a statement sent out yesterday by leading UK faith leaders raising deep disappointment with the review. The 7 faith leaders' comment:

"The entry into force of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition in of Nuclear Weapons is an encouraging development. As people of faith, we join with millions across the world who are working towards the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Living up to our responsibilities under the Non-Proliferation Treaty would be a step towards realising that vision. We believe that 'Global Britain' should strive for peaceful and cooperative international relationships, and joint endeavour on climate change, global poverty and other challenges. This announcement takes us in a worrying and wholly wrong direction." (4)

NFLA would completely agree with that assessment. This new UK review appears to seek to create a more assertive defence and foreign policy that emphasises Britain as an ongoing global power, when for NFLA it would be much better to encourage multilateral cooperation, as has taken place to some degree with the global Covid-19 pandemic.

NFLA Steering Committee Chair, Councillor David Blackburn, said:

"The NFLA will carefully study the Government's integrated defence review and publish a more detailed report soon. However, we remain alarmed to an apparent move in the posture on nuclear weapons which clearly suggests retaining more Trident warheads. The UK Government should rather be continuing the process began by previous Labour and Conservative Governments over the past 30 years which has seen slow reductions in our nuclear weapons stockpile and speed these processes up. Adding billions of pounds in new investment for defence infrastructure, whilst at the same time slashing the international aid budget for those in our world who are most vulnerable, does not send out the right signals to the world. Multilateral nuclear disarmament remains essential in our world, and this review suggests a clear tonal move to a more aggressive unilateral defence policy promoting, rather than apologising for, our nuclear weapons programme. NFLA strongly opposes such a change in policy direction."

Notes to Editors:

- (1) ICAN, March 15th, 2021 UK Nuclear Warhead Media Background
https://www.icanw.org/uk_nuclear_warhead_increase
- (2) The Guardian, March 16th, 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/16/keir-starmer-accuses-pm-of-breaking-policy-on-nuclear-disarmament>
- (3) UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Joint 'P5' statement on the 50th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, March 10th, 2021
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-the-fiftieth-anniversary-of-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons>
- (4) Statement from Church Leaders on the UK announcement on nuclear warhead numbers, 16th March 2021 provided to the NFLA by Steve Hucklesby, Methodist Church.
It is co-signed by the Anglican Archbishops of York and of Wales, the Anglican Bishop of St David's, the Moderator of the United Reformed Church, the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham and the Bishop of Clifton on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, the President and the Vice President of the Methodist Church, the Moderator of the Baptist Union Council and the Recording Clerk of the Quakers in Britain.