



October 6, 2017

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Email: chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca

Re: Canada's absence from multilateral process to ban nuclear weapons

Dear Minister Freeland:

On behalf of the 25 member denominations of the Canadian Council of Churches, we express our best wishes and appreciation for the important work carried out by Global Affairs Canada on many fronts under your leadership. Please be assured of our support for any and all efforts that contribute to a more peaceful, just and secure global order, and which are in the best interests of Canadians and the international community.

The Canadian Council of Churches has, for decades, written to successive prime ministers to express our convictions that safety and security do not come through the threat or through the use of nuclear weapons. On June 25, 2010, we wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

We believe that to rely on nuclear weapons, to threaten nuclear attack as a foundation for security, is to acquiesce to spiritual and moral bankruptcy. We say without reservation that when measures employed to defend nation states and human institutions undermine God's gift of abundant life, threatening humanity and the planet itself, such measures must be unequivocally rejected. We cannot conceive how the use of nuclear weapons could be justified and consistent with the will of God, and we must therefore conclude that nuclear weapons must also be rejected as means of threat or deterrence. (See https://www.councilofchurches.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Church_Leaders_Letter_on_Nuclear_Disarmament.pdf.)

We therefore write to convey our deep concern about the unacceptable threat to humanity posed by nuclear weapons, and about Canada's role in the pursuit of a world free of

these instruments of mass destruction. While this goal has been unambiguously affirmed by successive Canadian governments, including the present one under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, we see Canada embracing a minority position that seems to block, rather than promote, the abolition of nuclear weapons.

In particular, we wish to express our disappointment in Canada's absence from the recent multilateral negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations on a "legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination." Despite the lack of support by states with nuclear weapons—as well as their nuclear-reliant allies, such as Canada and most NATO members—negotiations resulted in a treaty establishing an explicit prohibition of nuclear weapons, which was adopted by a clear majority at the United Nations on July 7.

The ban treaty's limitations are well known. Some stem from the reluctance of states such as Canada, to participate in the process. Whatever the position of outliers, the ban not only fills a void under international law, but serves to further stigmatize these already illegitimate weapons. The oft-heard arguments that such efforts are premature or that international security conditions are not ripe are no longer credible. Nuclear disarmament efforts must be started, implemented and finalized under international security conditions that will be less than perfect.

The global momentum toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is largely driven by widespread frustration at the blatant disregard by nuclear-weapons states of the obligation to disarm, more than 45 years after the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In recent years, the push for nuclear abolition has been energized by renewed attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapons exchange.

Numerous global security flashpoints have made conceivable the frightening prospect of a nuclear-weapons conflict. Unless nuclear weapons are completely eliminated, there is a real risk that most of what humanity holds dear will be destroyed. Beyond the legal case for elimination, we consider it a moral imperative to make concrete progress toward this long elusive objective.

In correspondence with Foreign Minister John Baird in April 2014, we expressed our "conviction that greater progress toward eliminating nuclear weapons is necessary, urgent and possible." Members of the Council still hold fast to this belief.

Two weeks ago, on September 20, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons opened for signatures at the United Nations in New York and, on the first day, 50 states became signatories—a number that has since grown. Canada was not one of them, but the door remains open. There is no doubt that Canada's embrace of this instrument would be welcomed by foreign governments and civil society, and would constitute a clear testament to our government's stated commitment to nuclear abolition.

We firmly believe that it is in the best interest of every nation to move decisively toward the shared goal of nuclear abolition and to consider the recently adopted nuclear ban treaty a necessary step toward that goal. We find it disconcerting that Canada's position on nuclear disarmament aligns with that of states with nuclear weapons. We urge you to reconsider your current policy so that Canada can become an early signatory to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Thank you for your attention and actions on this important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Gehrs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Paul Gehrs
Chair, Commission on Justice and Peace

Cc:

Hon. Erin O'Toole, MP, Foreign Affairs Critic, Conservative Party of Canada
Hélène Laverdière, MP, Critic for Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party of Canada
Luc Thériault, MP, Foreign Affairs Critic, Bloc Québécois Critic
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader, Green Party of Canada

The Canadian Council of Churches is the broadest and most inclusive ecumenical body in the world, now representing 25 denominations of Anglican; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox; Protestant; and Catholic traditions. Together we represent more than 85% of the Christians in Canada. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.