

“Back from the Brink” Campaign:

The Sandy Spring Peace Committee brought the following recommendation to Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting on February 4, 2018, for consideration—and obtained its immediate approval. BYM’s Peace and Social Concerns Committee now request that BYM and monthly meeting join this effort, also to endorsement the “Back from the Brink” campaign. This is a national campaign originated by Physicians for Social Responsibility and endorsed by many national organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) & Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).

Local communities of faith and other organizations around the country are being asked to endorse the campaign. Endorsement shows support for reducing the threat of nuclear war and provides political power to those who are working to reduce the threat.

The campaign’s plan, which includes five elements and states the following: “We call on the United States to lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war by:

- renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
- ending the sole, unchecked authority of any President to launch a nuclear attack;
- taking US nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert ;
- cancelling the plan to replace its entire arsenal with enhanced weapons;
- actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.”

We ask that BYM and each Monthly Meeting endorse this plan and designate a liaison to assist in informing local Friends when other action is needed.

Two bills in Congress groups currently are in Congress: HR 669/SR 200, which would take the unilateral power to start a nuclear war away from the President, and HR 4415, which states that it is the policy of the U.S. not to use nuclear weapons first. For example, of Maryland’s eight congressional representatives, only Senator Van Hollen and Reps. Cummings, Raskin and Sarbanes have endorsed these. JEAN AND ELLEN TO ADD OTHER STATES.

Advocates will ask other local apolitical bodies, such as the Baltimore City Council and the Montgomery County Council, to endorse “Back from the Brink,” as a political message to the Federal government. Advocates will be available for more information these matters to Monthly Meetings on request.

Background: Since the height of the Cold War, the US and Russia have dismantled more than 50,000 nuclear warheads, but 15,000 of these weapons still exist and pose an intolerable risk to human survival. Ninety percent of these weapons are in the hands of the United States and Russia. The use of even a tiny fraction of these weapons would cause worldwide climate disruption and global famine. As few as 100 Hiroshima sized bombs, small by modern standards, would put at least 5 million tons of soot into the upper atmosphere and cause climate disruption across the planet, cutting food production and putting 2 billion people at risk of starvation. A large scale nuclear war would kill hundreds of millions of people directly and cause unimaginable environmental damage. It would also cause catastrophic climate disruption, dropping temperatures across the planet to levels not seen since the last ice age. Under these conditions the vast majority of the human race would starve and it is possible we would become extinct as a species.

Despite assurances that these arsenals exist solely to guarantee they are never used, there have been many occasions when nuclear armed countries have prepared to use these weapons, and war has been averted at the last minute. Moreover, the U.S. has frequently threatened the use of nuclear weapons. Speaking of these threats,

Daniel Ellsberg has said, “Any threat of first use of a nuclear weapon is a terrorist threat. Any nation making such threats is a terrorist nation.”

The Trump Administration, in its Nuclear Posture Review (recently leaked), augments the role of nuclear weapons in military plans. The document also loosens current restraints on the use of nuclear weapons by expanding the list of situations that could trigger their use. For example, the Administration wants the ability to use “lower-yield nuclear weapons” in battlefield situations; these “lower-yield” weapons are less powerful than the majority of weapons in the U.S. arsenal, but they are equal in power to the bombs that we used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The planned expenditure of \$1.2 trillion to enhance our nuclear arsenal will exacerbate these dangers by fueling a global arms race and it will divert crucial resources needed to assure the well-being of the American people. It is not surprising that the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists recently concluded that we are at the most dangerous period since the organization began its “Doomsday Clock”: the Bulletin moved the minute hand closer to zero--we are now only two minutes from midnight. That is, according to these scientists, we have never been closer to world-wide nuclear war than we are today.

Former Secretary of Defense William Perry, once a Cold War warrior, stated in December, “We are sleepwalking into a catastrophe. . . The risk now is greater than it was during the Cold War.” There is an alternative to this march to nuclear war. In July of 2017, 122 nations called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The United States needs to embrace this call for nuclear disarmament as the centerpiece of our national security policy. The threatened destruction of the Earth and all its people is a critical moral issue for our time.