

SISTERS INFLUENCE CITY TO SUPPORT NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN

SAINT JOHN, N.B. -- Two Sisters of Charity, I.C. recently influenced the Saint John mayor and council to endorse the Cities Appeal of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The campaign calls for support for the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which entered into force Jan. 22, 2021. Among other Canadian municipalities to endorse the Cities Appeal are Halifax and Cape Breton, N.S., as well as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

In January this year, Sisters Muriel Buckley (*photo, left*) and Roma De Robertis of Saint John each sent letters to Mayor Don Darling and city councillors. At their April 19 meeting, the municipal leaders responded by voting to endorse ICAN's Cities Appeal.

Sr. Muriel said the endorsement is "important for everyone in the Saint John area." She added that the decision is also vital for people worldwide and for "earth and the planet."

Originally from Saint John, she was a longtime missionary in Peru among those experiencing poverty and environmental destruction after years of military and economic colonization. Sr. Muriel added, "I really feel we have to do something to change our way of living."

Sr. Roma said she was grateful local civic leaders responded positively to ICAN's Cities Appeal for the sake of local and global peace with justice. However, she said she hopes leaders and citizens will more fully recognize dangerous connections between planned nuclear energy expansion and nuclear weapons.

ICAN received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its efforts to achieve and promote the UN treaty prohibiting development, possession and use of nuclear weapons. The Holy See (Vatican) was one of the first states to sign and ratify the treaty.

Globally, nine countries possess an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons. Russia and the United States possess most of these weapons of mass destruction. In their 2019 Statement on Nuclear Weapons, Canada's Catholic Bishops strongly opposed such weapons and appealed to the government of Canada to sign the treaty.

However, Canada has neither signed nor ratified the UN treaty. In 2019, Sisters of Charity and Associates wrote letters to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urging the Canadian government to sign the UN nuclear weapons ban treaty. While Canada does not have nuclear weapons, it supports the retention and potential use of such weapons on its behalf as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Known as “nuclear deterrence,” this theory holds that possession of nuclear weapons is necessary to deter other states from attacking with their nuclear weapons. However, Catholic teaching rejects both possession and use of nuclear weapons.

At a Vatican symposium in November 2017, Pope Francis rejected the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Referring to nuclear weapons, he explicitly condemned “the threat of their use, as well as their very possession.”

Raising Concerns

The pope has gone further to question the safety of nuclear energy. During his November 2019 visit to Japan, he highlighted the Japanese bishops’ call for an end to nuclear power. Later, as reported by Reuters news agency, the pope told journalists “there is not enough security to guarantee that there will not be a disaster” from the use of nuclear energy.

In 2011, Japan was rocked by an earthquake which triggered a tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdown in Fukushima. Major nuclear power plant disasters have also occurred in other parts of the world, unleashing deadly radioactive debris.

Proponents of nuclear energy claim it reduces carbon gas emissions to help address climate change, while generating needed electricity and providing jobs. Partnering with the nuclear industry, the federal and New Brunswick governments have invested millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money to expand nuclear energy through development of small modular nuclear reactors. Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta are also investing in SMNRs.

Plans are underway for SMNRs to be built at the same site as the only nuclear generating station now operating outside Ontario. Owned and operated by the

New Brunswick Power Corporation, the Point Lepreau nuclear station is about 50 km west of Saint John on the Bay of Fundy.

However, critics of planned SMNRs call instead for governments to invest in renewable energy, as well as energy efficiency and energy storage technologies. Their concerns about nuclear energy include high costs and major risks to human health and the environment. They also highlight lack of safe storage options for highly radioactive nuclear waste.

Critics also warn about links between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons. They point to threats posed by terrorist groups and criminal organizations seeking radioactive plutonium produced by nuclear reactors. Internationally, Canada has long sold uranium as nuclear fuel and has also marketed conventional nuclear reactors.

During the Second World War, Canada joined the United States and United Kingdom in their efforts to produce a nuclear bomb. According to an official government website, Canada provided uranium to help fuel two atomic bombs the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945. After the war, Canada continued to supply uranium for military purposes.

With many others, Sisters Muriel and Roma continue to advocate for a future free from nuclear weapons, as well as an end to plans for nuclear energy expansion for the sake of humanity, earth and all creation.

For more about ICAN and the Cities Appeal, please see www.icanw.org

~ Story by Roma De Robertis, SCIC

~ Photo by Patty Marshall