

THE BELLS ARE RINGING

....or will be at St John's at 6pm on Friday 22 January to mark the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Jim Roarty writes: 'On Friday 22 January, our church bells, along with those across four continents, will ring for 5 minutes to celebrate the passing into international law of the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons Treaty. This is the first globally applicable agreement to outlaw nuclear weapons completely. The Treaty prohibits nations from: developing, testing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons, or allowing them to be stationed on their territory.

In practice, the countries already holding stacks of nuclear weapons, including the UK, have refused to sign up for this but it marks a step along the road of maintaining the pressure on these countries.'

Margaret Bremner writes: 'On a historic visit to The Atomic bombed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2019, Pope Francis condemned the use and possession of nuclear weapons as immoral. He urged support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which 122 states, including the Vatican, voted to adopt at the United Nations in July 2017. **It is the first globally applicable agreement to outlaw nuclear weapons completely.**

The Vatican was among the first states to ratify the Treaty and now that over 50 states have ratified it, **the Treaty will enter into force on the 22nd January, 2021.**

This treaty challenges the status quo. The more countries that sign up the more pressure there will be on nuclear armed states to cease their illegal activities and comply with the treaty. Since the entry into force of other weapons treaties, such as landmine and cluster munitions, even countries that had not signed up have virtually ceased production of these weapons. More countries are signing up, and although most of the current ratifications are from the global south, peer pressure from other governments will increase with time. Listening to the voices of survivors of the bombing in Japan, and indigenous people whose lands were bomb test sites, makes it impossible to ignore the effects of nuclear weapons and this treaty will also call for reparation for them and remediation for affected land.

On the 22nd January we will celebrate with joy the Entry into Force of the Treaty. People in every part of the world have played a part in getting us this far. We call for a foreign policy directed towards disarmament rather than war. **We call on the UK government to sign the Treaty.** Along with the USA, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea they are holding on to their nuclear weapons and do not currently see disarmament as urgent. The Treaty on the prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the way forward.'

Overleaf is an article from John Mayer who lives near St Mary Magdalene's and who was the advocate for the 'Trident Three' – the three middle-aged ladies who went on trial for boarding the nuclear facility at Faslane and causing damage in an anti-nuclear weapon protest in 1999. (He got them off on the basis that although they had committed a crime that was done to prevent a crime as Trident was an illegal weapon under international law!)

John Mayer - Glad Tidings of Great Joy

As a lawyer in the Supreme Courts of Scotland, over say, twenty or thirty years one would rarely if ever hear the phrase 'Rejoice, for today Glad Tidings of Great Joy' are upon us. No. Surely that's something one hears at Christmas and only in churches. Well, on Friday 22 January 2021, there will be cause to celebrate a new law which affects all of humankind. Church bells will ring in celebration on four continents. Peaceful celebrations will happen in public and those who have campaigned tirelessly for decades to see this law put in place will have a moment to draw breath. For on that day, the Secretary General of the United Nations will put his name to a monumental law which will apply all over the world.

So what is this mysterious law and why is it so important? Well, when fifty or more countries 'ratify' a Treaty, then what that Treaty says becomes international law. That happens routinely, but this one is a whopper! It's the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons Treaty and tiny little Honduras was the fiftieth country to ratify.

The Treaty itself was written away back in the early 1970s. So why has it taken so long to become law? The answer to that lies mostly at the door of the United States. For decades, the USA has held small countries to ransom with a quid pro quo which goes: If you ratify that Treaty, we'll cut your foreign aid. Well, Mr Trump has slashed many small countries' foreign aid: so now there's no barrier to their ratification. You could say that he shot himself in the foot.

So what happens now? Well under the Scotland Act 1998, the law of Scotland is solely a matter for the Scottish Parliament. Under the SNP, the Scottish Government has long declared itself to be wholly against the threat or, God forbid, the use of nuclear weapons. So the argument goes, that when this international law becomes part of Scottish Law, the legal supervision (if not the funding and operations) of nuclear weapons in Scotland becomes a matter within the devolved responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. Some years ago I was privileged to draft a 'Nuclear Security Bill' which was based on the terms of the Treaty. That Bill is gathering dust in the office of the Justice Minister. On Friday afternoon of 22 January 2021 it will be time to dust that Bill down and begin the joyous journey of seeing an end to the threat or use of nuclear weapons in the wee country we call home.