

Dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 75 years ago taught the world about indiscriminate devastation—women, children, civilians, military, the environment. Since then, the destructive power of the bombs has been exponentially increased. Experts agree that even a limited exchange could render our planet uninhabitable and would be enough to create nuclear winter, lowering the planet's temperature making food cultivation impossible.

The nuclear threat threatens our very existence more than ever. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock is set at 100 seconds to midnight; it has never been closer.

Two paths diverge. The US and Russia, the nuclear giants, have launched a new global nuclear arms race. They are investing trillions of dollars in a new generation of bomb plants and bombs—including the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) in Oak Ridge. This path leads to increased peril worldwide. The UPF increases the peril for our local communities. We won't survive a nuclear incident like the Fukushima earthquake/tsunami—our East Tennessee earthquake ratings have skyrocketed in the last ten years—unscathed.

The non-nuclear nations are following the second path: 122 of them signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations in 2017. That Treaty, with more than 80 official signatory states and 40 ratifications, is nearing entry into force. When in force, the US, Russia, and other nuclear states will be international outlaws—rogue nations—though the US will likely declare exemption from the Treaty by virtue of refusing to sign or ratify it.

When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, Beatrice Fihn said, “There are only two possible endings to the story of nuclear weapons. Either we end them, or they end us. There is no other ending.”

75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we have a moment to reflect and choose. As nations amass devastating arsenals, survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *hibakusha*, have called out to the world with their tragic stories. Several have visited us in Oak Ridge and Knoxville with the same message: “We were there. We saw. It must never happen again. Never.”

The only way to assure that nuclear weapons are not used again is to get rid of them completely. Disarmament is possible as some nuclear states have exemplified. Dismantling weapons, waste disposal, site remediation and the related science can provide indefinite employment. International inspection protocols can verify that countries keep their word. Additionally, nearly 200 nations demonstrate the daily possibility of life and security without nuclear weapons.

The stumbling blocks to a nuclear-weapon free world are the political will and the mythologies promulgated by the nuclear-industrial complex. Our leaders want to brandish weapons they think make them invincible—in fact, people like Henry

Kissinger, William Perry, George Schulz and Sam Nunn, and hundreds of other military and diplomatic leaders from around the world, have indicated that our nuclear stockpiles make us *less* secure.

No matter how you feel about the history, this existential threat is the current reality. The COVID-19 pandemic should teach us the danger of complacency in the face of improbable threats which, if they happen, would be devastating. COVID-19 is miniscule compared to the nuclear threat. We can't make a vaccine against nuclear weapons. We can't quarantine ourselves from nuclear fallout. We can't produce food in a nuclear winter. But we can get rid of the threat altogether. Starting on that path would be an appropriate way to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—now, before our options disappear as the Doomsday Clock continues to tick.

Kevin D. Collins  
8104 Becky Lane  
Knoxville, TN 37920  
865-851-5724