

# UT and the Bomb — A Fact Sheet

ON DECEMBER 9, 2020, Randy Boyd, President of the University of Tennessee, announced that UT would partner with Texas A&M University to bid on the management and operations contract for the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, Texas.

The contract would make the university a manufacturer of nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons have been condemned by nearly every mainstream faith



community in the United States and around the world as fundamentally immoral, and, as of January 22, 2021, are illegal under international law.

Why would the university do this? UT's President Boyd said it was a "no-brainer." The contract to operate and manage the two bomb plants is worth as much as \$2 billion a year.

The lure of money, however, should not be allowed to overwhelm other considerations, chief among them—moral considerations.



**THE Y-12** National Security Complex in Oak Ridge manufactures the thermonuclear core for US nuclear weapons. This core, also called the secondary, is what turns an atomic bomb into a hydrogen bomb, multiplying its destructive force many times over.

Today, workers at Y-12 are producing secondaries to upgrade W-76 warheads as part of the "Life Extension Program."

Y-12 is the only facility in the US that has the capacity to make secondaries for nuclear weapons; Y-12 has made this key component for every nuclear weapon in the US stockpile ever.

Y-12 is also a highly contaminated Superfund site. During storm events, mercury releases into East Fork Poplar Creek routinely violate EPA standards.

**A SINGLE NUCLEAR WARHEAD**, detonated over Knoxville, Tennessee, would reduce the city and most of the university buildings to rubble, killing more than 100,000 people immediately. It would destroy communications, roads and bridges, making travel impossible. Radiation would poison the city water supply, ponds, lakes and rivers. Radiation sickness would kill tens of thousands more people in the weeks to follow.

A "limited" nuclear exchange between the US and Russia would trigger a phenomenon known as "nuclear winter." The temperature of the planet would drop by more than 10°, making it impossible to grow most food crops, and triggering a global famine lasting 10 years.

This is why nuclear weapons are called an *existential threat*. If only a fraction of the world's current nuclear weapons are used in an attack, they will render Earth unable to sustain life—human, animal, and most plants.

Right now, the United States has more than 3,500 nuclear weapons in its arsenal; 1,525 are actively deployed around the world on hair-trigger alert. Russia has a similar number.

The risk is not just war. Accidents, hacks, technology glitches and human error have led to numerous "near misses" over the last three decades. You can stream *The Man Who Saved the World*—a true story—to get a sense of the risk.



**MORE THAN 170** faith communities around the world declared nuclear weapons immoral and called for their abolition. Their statement hailed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force on January 22, 2021.

“As people of faith, we believe that the possession, development and threat to use nuclear weapons is immoral,” said the statement signed by many religious groups, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Church, the Islamic Society of North America, Quakers, Buddhists, Catholic communities, and scores of religious communities around the world.

This statement echoes the words of Pope Francis who said, on the 75th anniversary of Hiroshima, “The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.

“It has never been clearer that for peace to flourish, all people need to lay down the weapons of war, and especially the most powerful and destructive of weapons: nuclear arms that can cripple and destroy whole cities, whole countries.”

**“The possession, development and threat to use nuclear weapons is immoral.”**

**THE TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION** of Nuclear Weapons, approved by 122 nations in 2017, entered into force on January 22, 2021. The Treaty commits each state party “never, under any circumstances, to develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire or possess or stockpile nuclear weapons.” The Treaty also outlaws assistance to any nations that do any of the above prohibited things.

The United States has not signed the Treaty and therefore says the Treaty does not apply to us. This is true in the technical legal sense.

But in the international arena, nuclear weapons are now in the same category as chemical weapons, biological weapons, cluster bombs, land mines and poison gas—they are illegal.

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the citizen driven effort that led to the Treaty, Beatrice Fihn said, “There are only two endings to the story of nuclear weapons. Either we end them, or they will end us. There is no other ending to the story.”



ICAN'S BEATRICE FIHN

**The University of Tennessee should not be involved in producing nuclear weapons that threaten all life on the planet, weapons that the world has declared to be immoral and unlawful.**

## **ACT NOW! — WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- **Educate yourself** and your friends and colleagues. Use this fact sheet.
- **Raise your voice.** Petitions, resolutions, letters, demonstrations—all of these actions are important ways to make your voice heard.
- **Get more resources.** The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance has been working for more than 30 years to end weapons production in Oak Ridge. We are happy to be a resource, to provide ideas and templates, to make presentations—just ask us. You can call 865 776 5050 or email [orep@earthlink.net](mailto:orep@earthlink.net)
- **Join the Facebook group**—DON'T BOMB UT—and pay attention. Facebook is a tool we can use to organize, support each other, share information, and build our strength.