



**OAK RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE ALLIANCE
PO BOX 5743 • OAK RIDGE, TN 37831**

Mr. Randy Boyd, President
University of Tennessee

via email: utpresident@tennessee.edu

February 11, 2021

Dear President Boyd,

On January 22, 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force and became part of the canon of international law. According to Article 1 of the Treaty, states party to the Treaty are prohibited under any circumstances from any of the following activities:

(a) Develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;

(b) Transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly or indirectly;

(c) Receive the transfer of or control over nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices directly or indirectly;

(d) Use or threaten to use nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;

(e) Assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Treaty;

(f) Seek or receive any assistance, in any way, from anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Treaty;

(g) Allow any stationing, installation or deployment of any nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in its territory or at any place under its jurisdiction or control.

Because the United States has neither signed nor ratified the Treaty it does not have the force of law in this country. But the Treaty was approved by 122 nations in 2017, and has since been signed by eighty-six nations and ratified by fifty-two. It is a clear reflection of the frustration and impatience of non-nuclear nations with nuclear weapons states that have failed to fulfill the promise they made “in good faith” in the Nonproliferation Treaty in 1970 to ne-



gotiate the cessation of the arms race and complete disarmament “at an early date.” While our country and other nuclear weapons states may attempt to sidestep the legal force of the Treaty, we cannot avoid the compelling moral power it carries.

This moral power was underscored by a joint statement released by more than 170 faith communities from around the world. Included among the signatories were the American Baptist Church, the Islamic Society of North America, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the National Council of Churches, The Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and the World Council of Churches. This statement stated bluntly: “As people of faith, we believe that the possession, development and threat to use nuclear weapons is immoral.”

The Treaty is the result of more than a decade of diligent and careful work by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), civil society, and non-nuclear nation states. The Treaty’s compelling moral power rests on its focus on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons—not only the devastating and catastrophic impact of the use of nuclear weapons, but the impacts of the mining of nuclear materials, the manufacture of weapons components, the testing of weapons, and the ongoing risks arising from their deployment and maintenance. Add to this the corrosive spiritual effect that nuclear weapons have on those who possess them and threaten to use them, and the compelling nature of the moral argument becomes clear.

On December 9, 2020, the *Knoxville New-Sentinel* reported that you were forming a partnership with Texas A&M University to tender a bid on the management contract for the Y-12 National Security Complex and the Pantex Plant. If successful, this bid would make the University of Tennessee a producer of the very weapons of mass destruction that are declared illegal under international law by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In the news report, you declared the decision to be “a no-brainer.” But surely the President of a University knows that brains are capable of considering more than money when making a decision. The moral considerations of engaging in the production of weapons of mass destruction are not inconsequential.

Already the University of Tennessee has the dubious distinction of being listed in the report *Schools of Mass Destruction* because of its involvement and support for nuclear weapons production activities. Your decision to bid on the Y-12 contract will only elevate UT’s standing on the list. As awareness of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons spreads, attention will be drawn to those institutions that fall outside the boundaries established by the Treaty. This will include corporate entities that do the hands-on production work, financial institutions that benefit from investments attached to weapons production, and academic institutions that are engaged in the work of producing weapons of mass destruction.

No doubt as students, faculty and administrators become more aware of your plan to commit their school to activities that fall outside the bounds of international law, you will be called on to take action. I am hoping you will not wait for those pressures to build, but will

instead be anxious to stand on the right side of history and will take immediate action to extricate the University of Tennessee from any and all activities that support the production of nuclear weapons of mass destruction—including walking away from the billion-dollar management and operations contract. Because some things are more important than money.

You have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership at the very point that science and morals come together. We urge you to step forward, to take decisions on behalf of the university that reflect the highest standards of morality and demonstrate the university's commitment to scholarship that is employed to the benefit of humankind and not its destruction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Collins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kevin Collins, President
Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance

cc: Alison Ross, alison.ross@tennessee.edu
Office of the President