

*Third Meeting of States Parties to the  
Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*  
United Nations Headquarters

**“Nuclear Weapons and Gender”**

Co-Convened by  
The Simons Foundation Canada  
and  
The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

New York, NY  
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*Opening Remarks*

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Founder and President,  
The Simons Foundation Canada*

Good Afternoon!

On behalf of The Simons Foundation Canada I would like to welcome you to the Panel, Nuclear Weapons and Gender, which we pleased to co-convene with the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. I would like to commend Dr. Ivana Hughes for the new breath of life she has brought to the Nuclear Age Foundation.

And I would like, also, to thank the sponsors of this event - the Governments of Mexico and Kiribati. And welcome their representatives to the panel joining my fellow Canadians, Senator Marilou McPhedran and Rooj Ali, Canadian Coordinator of Reverse the Trend.

The issue of Nuclear Weapons and Gender is an extremely important issue. All of us - *men, women and children* - are collateral damage in a nuclear incident whether from a nuclear war, an accident, an accidental or malicious launch of a nuclear weapon, or from those ticking time bombs like Chernobyl and Fukushima, whose radiation effects are negatively affecting the physical and psychological health of so many people around the world.

Women and children though are, indisputably, at greater risk from radioactive isotopes than men.

It has been scientifically proven that the radioactive fallout is significantly more dangerous for women. The health of women, their lives, their reproductive health and the health of children are endangered. Women are at greater risk of developing cancer than men. Women have higher rates of leukemia and thyroid cancers. They suffer from high incidences of breast cancer, still birth-rates, and from high suicide rates.

We know this from the consequences of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing, from the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters and from the horrifying and tragic consequences of the nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands. This was devastating for the women who gave birth to entities like bunches of grapes, and babies born without bones, or with transparent skin so that the beating hearts were visible.

As we explore the issue today, we need to be developing strategies to eliminate this tragic fate - to ensure the safety and health of women, children and future generations.

Women have played an important and effective role in the global nuclear disarmament movement since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They have participated as individuals, in groups, and many within women-specific organizations in active opposition to nuclear weapons.

One successful civil movement of predominantly young mothers -and one very important for nuclear disarmament - was the 1958 St. Louis Baby-Teeth Survey. Women discovered that the breast milk they were feeding their babies was contaminated with traces of Radio-active Strontium 90 and they mobilized to fight for the end of nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere.

The testing of baby teeth of children, born between 1945 and 1965, showed levels of Radio-active Strontium 90 that had risen a 100-fold; and rose and fell in correlation with atomic bomb tests. The resulting campaign to ban testing, acted as a spur to President Kennedy to negotiate a treaty to ban nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in space, and in the water.

In 2001 a set of 85,000 of these teeth was discovered in storage at Washington University. The teeth were given to the [Radiation and Public Health Project](#) which then tracked the individuals who had participated in the tooth-collection project. The results are quite disturbing. They showed that *those children who later died of cancer before the age of 50* had levels of [strontium 90](#) in their stored baby teeth that was *twice the level* of those who were still alive at age 50.

This is just one example of the evidence of crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of security, and an example of the power of women.

The current TPNW Draft Report<sup>1</sup> states that there is little *information* available as “to what extent nuclear planning and targeting assessments in nuclear-armed states **consider in concrete terms the consequences of nuclear weapons use on human beings and societies**, including compliance with the obligations of international humanitarian law.”

There is, actually, much readily available information on devastating consequences of the use of nuclear weapons on human beings and societies from the bombings in Japan, from weapons tests in the Marshall Islands and Kazakhstan to name two places, and from the Chernobyl and Fukushima explosions. And there is much information - readily available - on states obligations to international humanitarian law .

Our task is to develop strategies to ensure that the policy makers, the nuclear planners, those responsible for targeting – in fact the whole command and control system- know and understand the consequences of their policy decisions and actions and their role as potential perpetrators of crimes against humanity in the event of the failure of the high risk nuclear deterrence system.

Further, it is essential to develop strategies - to find a way to further this knowledge – to bring it to the forefront of attention parliaments and congress who are committed to protect the people they represent, and of course, to the general public.

Medical prescriptions are required by law to present information on the risks associated with the medication - contra-indications of a prescribed drug. We should demand that the same rules that apply to risks to individuals, by law apply to risks to humanity, and specifically those associated with the reliance on nuclear deterrence for our security.

So I call on you here today not to keep this information we all know about the dangers to predominantly to health of women, their lives, their productive health, and the health of children, within the confines of the nuclear disarmament community - preaching to the choir I think is the term. But rather, to work to disseminate to the policy makers, the nuclear planners and those responsible for targeting, all those tasked with the responsibility for the nuclear deterrence system to make public the contra-indications, the risks associated with the failure nuclear deterrence concept of security.

Thank you!

**END**

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<sup>1</sup> *Consultative process on security concerns of States under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*