

Nuclear disarmament for Scotland

Alex Salmond MSP

Alex Salmond is First Minister of Scotland. On 15 October 2007, he wrote to the Ambassadors of the 122 countries that have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you, as representative of a State Party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to inform you of the Scottish Government's views and determination to play as constructive a part as possible in pursuing our country's nuclear disarmament obligations under the NPT. We also intend to explore the possibility of taking up observer status at future NPT meetings, so that we can more directly and effectively represent the aspirations and interests of Scotland's people. In the event that we do seek that status, I would hope we would be able to count on your government's support.

As you may know, the United Kingdom currently deploys a 4-submarine Trident nuclear weapon system from the Faslane Naval Base in Scotland. The UK also stores up to 200 nuclear warheads a few miles further along the coast, in Coulport. Last March the UK government pushed through the Westminster Parliament a preliminary decision to renew the Trident system, thereby signalling its intention to continue to make and deploy nuclear weapons beyond 2050. The majority of Scottish people and their elected representatives oppose these deployments.

In May, for the first time since the nuclear age began in 1945, the people of Scotland elected a government that is opposed to nuclear weapons. On 14 June, the Scottish Parliament debated the following motion in relation to the UK Government's policy on nuclear weapons:

'That the Parliament congratulates the majority of Scottish MPs for voting on 14 March 2007 to reject the replacement of Trident, recognises that decisions on matters of defence are matters within the responsibility of the UK Government and Parliament and calls on the UK Government not to go ahead at this time with the proposal in the White Paper, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*.'

The Scottish Parliament showed clear and overwhelming opposition to the UK

Government's plan to replace its Trident nuclear weapons system (by 71 votes to 16, with 39 abstentions), and widespread support for this Government's vision of a Scotland without nuclear weapons.

During the debate, the Scottish Government signalled its intention to reflect on the views of the majority of Scots and carefully consider which aspects of the UK Government's plans to replace Trident impact on our responsibilities in Scotland under devolution. We made it clear that we will do all that we can, in light of those responsibilities, to persuade the UK Government to change its stance both on the replacement programme and on the general principle of maintaining and deploying nuclear weapons.

Recognising that there are a range of views on the constitutional future of Scotland, we have embarked on a National Conversation with the Scottish public on the options for constitutional change leading to further development of the way we govern ourselves. As part of this debate on Scotland's constitutional future, we will be holding a high level meeting of key stakeholders from across Scottish life to discuss the implications of the replacement of Trident and what a Scotland without nuclear weapons might look like.

I would like to assure you of Scotland's deep commitment to international peace and security, and our desire to participate in making the case for implementation of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation provisions of the NPT and other relevant international agreements and treaties. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you or your government wish to discuss these issues further.