Breaking the Silence!

In the late 1960s, the farcical spy show Get Smart had a running gag when they gathered to discuss top secret subjects. “Lower the Cone of Silence,” the Chief would order, and a plexiglass structure would descend from the ceiling—it had bubbles to cover each speaker around the table. It was remarkably effective in a way—the people in the bubble could not hear each other speak, so they would end up yelling at the top of their lungs. And we, the viewers outside the bubble, were privy to the entire top secret conversation, as was anyone who had bugged the office.

We’ve come a long way since then in secret-keeping. Take, for instance, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Major mainstream media outlets in the United States have maintained an almost complete silence about the existence of the Treaty even as it garners additional signatures and ratifications, and even as nations of the world prepare to gather in Vienna, Austria, this month for the First Meeting of States Parties. (See Box, Page 2)

It is this total silence about the Ban Treaty that inspired the Nuclear Ban Treaty Collaborative’s campaign to Break the Silence. The Collaborative, of which OREPA is a key member, is organizing to demand that the US media acknowledge the Treaty and include it in its coverage of nuclear weapons issues.

The campaign chose the month of June to focus its efforts for two reasons. June 12 marked the fortieth anniversary of the million person march for nuclear disarmament in New York City—the largest peace demonstration in US history at the time and for decades later.

We figured the media might be paying a little more attention to nuclear weapons on the anniversary.

The second reason was the First Meeting of States Parties to the Ban Treaty—scheduled for Vienna, Austria, June 21-23.

The first step in the campaign was...
the release of a Statement on the Current Nuclear Threat and on the Treaty on the
Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. OREPA held a media release event at the federal
courthouse in Knoxville to deliver the state-
ment on June 7. We were joined by other
local media events around the country.

More than 150 organizations repre-
senting hundreds of thousands of people
endorsed the statement, and their names
appeared in a full page “Dear Mr. President”
ad featuring the statement in the Delaware
News Journal—the paper read by President
Biden. Many hundreds of individuals have
also signed the statement—you can learn
more about it on the Ban Treaty Collabora-
tive’s web site: nuclearbantreaty.org.

The second stage of the campaign
followed a week later as hundreds of peo-
ple across the country flooded three major
media outlets with letters calling for cover-
age of the Treaty every time they discuss
the threat of nuclear weapons.

It is no exaggeration to say that it is
journalistically dishonest to discuss the nu-
clear threat as though the TPNW does not
exist. In fact, it not only exists; it provides
the only pathway to a safe, secure future free
of the nuclear threat.

One piece of the effort to press the me-
dia to do their job is to call for coverage
of the First Meeting of States Parties in Vienna,
Austria, later this month.

Much of the First Meeting will be lives-
treamed on UN-TV, and ICAN (icanw.org)
will also provide streaming—but the six
hour time difference may make it a chal-
lenge for people in the US to catch the news.

Never fear! The Ban Treaty Collabora-
tive has arranged for our friends, John
LaForge and Marion Küpker, who will be in
Vienna, to give us a live report on the FMSP
on Tuesday, June 21, at 1:00pm Eastern
time. Links to the zoom and other informa-
tion will be posted at nuclearbantreaty.org.

The last time the New York Times men-
tioned the TPNW was
October of 2020, when Honduras became the 50th nation to ratify
the Treaty, triggering its Entry in Force. In all the coverage of nuclear
weapons since then, including a surge since Vladimir Putin invaded
Ukraine, the TPNW has not been mentioned once.

National Public Radio has had four significant reports about
nuclear weapons in the last three months, including a seven minute
report on Sunday, March 27. None of the reports mentioned the
TPNW—the last time NPR mentioned it was in January 2021 when
it reported on the Treaty’s entry into force, noting it was a significant
treaty becoming international law. Since then, crickets.

The seven minute NPR segment in March focused solely on the
now almost completely discredited Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty
and the broken promises of the nuclear-armed states. It was a perfect
moment to pivot to the promise and challenges of the TPNW. But
not for NPR.

CNN is marginally better. A search of the website for “nuclear
weapons” turns up almost daily reports; but the Treaty on the Prohi-
bition of Nuclear Weapons gets only one mention—an op/ed on May
3 from Ira Helfland, co-president of International Physicians for the
Prevention of Nuclear War.

Better than nothing, but not actual reporting about the Treaty.
The last reporting on the TPNW was in July of 2021, in a report on
China’s apparent upgrading of their missile capabilities.

The CNN report included: “Speaking in response to a ques-
tion on China’s position regarding the United Nation’s Treaty on the
Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which Beijing does not recognize,
Hua maintained that China’s nuclear forces are always kept at what
she described as the minimum level required to safeguard national
security. ‘This is the Chinese government’s consistent basic policy,’
said Hua.”

Missing from that report, of course, is the fact that the US also
“does not recognize” the TPNW, and, unlike China, which capped
its nuclear stockpile in the low hundreds some decades ago, the US
continues to maintain a stockpile of more than 4,000 warheads and
bombs, with more than 1,500 actively deployed on hair-trigger alert.

Members of the West Knox Friends meeting
are joined by others on Market Square in
downtown Knoxville on Tuesday, June 7, to
mark the nationwide release of the Statement
on the Existential Threat of Nuclear Weapons
and on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear
Weapons. The weather was nice and a
surprising number of people passing by
stopped to chat or pick up a flyer.
The power to initiate a global apocalypse lies in the hands of the leaders of nine nations.

As 122 nations of the world indicated when they adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July, 2017, this is unacceptable.

As concerns about the threat of nuclear weapons re-enter the public consciousness, it is important to know that humankind is not without an answer to the nuclear threat. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force on January 22, 2021, provides a clear pathway to the elimination of the nuclear threat.

We call on all nuclear armed states to take immediate steps to:
- engage the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
- attend the First Meeting of States Parties, and
- sign, ratify and implement the Treaty.

We also call on the US media to recognize the existence of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to include the Treaty in discussions, articles, and editorials regarding the nuclear threat and methods available to address it.

For the sixty-one states that have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, officially joining the treaty was only the first step. The next steps will be taken June 21-23 at the First Meeting of States Parties in Vienna, Austria.

The First Meeting, delayed by six months by the covid pandemic, will focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons use and testing. According to ICAN, the designated liaison for non-governmental organizations, the meeting is expected to “commit to concrete actions to implement obligations under the Treaty, including on providing assistance to victims of nuclear weapon use and testing, beginning to remediate contaminated environments, and universalizing the treaty.”

States are also expected to begin a conversation about some of the unsettled technical details of the treaty. One such key detail is determining the amount of time a nuclear armed state will have to meet its obligation to disarm once it joins the treaty.

In addition to states that have signed the treaty, other nations can attend as observers. It was seen as a breakthrough when Norway and Germany indicated they would attend the First Meeting as observers. Non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society are expected to attend the First Meeting.

The topic of the First Meeting will highlight the very heart of the Ban Treaty — its recognition of the human and environmental costs of nuclear weapons, and its insistence that these must be addressed.

Voices from affected communities around the world will be elevated and amplified at the First Meeting. Hibkusha, survivors of the atomic bombings of Japan, as well as Pacific Islanders and other states, regions, and communities subject to impacts from nuclear testing will submit papers and make presentations during the official proceedings.

The focus on the human and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons is one of the things that makes the TPNW a powerful tool for the abolition movement. The nuclear establishment has long sought to control the conversation about nuclear weapons, limiting discussion to technical, policy, or security concerns.

But when Vladimir Putin’s missile rattling awakened people to the nuclear threat, they did not ask about the elements of the nuclear posture review or the budget for nuclear weapons. The 70% of people in the US who are “concerned or very concerned” about nuclear weapons are asking: “Will nuclear weapons kill me or the people I love and ruin the earth?”

In Articles 6 and 7 of the treaty, the nations of the world have said that every discussion of nuclear weapons should include the fundamental considerations: what is the human and environmental cost of these weapons?

One answer can be seen in the bloody ruins of Ukraine. Even before he invaded, Vladimir Putin made a speech in France in which he referenced the possibility of nuclear war, a war, he said, in which “there will be no winners.”

Without the backing of his massive nuclear stockpile, Putin would not be in Ukraine today; cities would not lie in rubble, millions would not be displaced, living as refugees in strange lands, and thousands would still be alive.

The First Meeting will conclude with the adoption of a paper that captures the will of the States Parties and provides increased momentum as the movement to eliminate nuclear weapons moves inexorably toward its goal.
Join OREPA for August Actions for Abolition

A time to remember the past and act to create a future free of nuclear weapons. We need you to help us send a strong message in support of the Ban Treaty!

W orkers at the Super Secret Y-12 plant in Oak Ridge in the 1940s worked on a round-the-clock schedule operating massive machines that filled entire buildings, sitting at a bank of dials for hours on end monitoring the performance of equipment, receiving sealed containers of materials to be weighed, recorded, and passed on.

Most of them had no idea what their work was—it would be August 1945 before they were informed—when the Little Boy bomb exploded over Hiroshima, Japan, killing tens of thousands of people in an instant, the Oak Ridge secret was revealed.

Y-12 workers had been producing the fuel for the first atomic bomb ever used in war. They were told that their efforts had hastened the war’s end. The true story was much darker. It would be almost a year before the devastating effects of the bomb would be told to the public in the United States and people would learn about radiation poisoning that would linger in bodies and cause cancer and leukemias for decades.

August 6 went down in history as the dawn of the nuclear age. Y-12, on the other hand, left history behind as it pushed forward, taking on a new mission—producing the thermonuclear secondaries for the new bomb, the H-bomb, a weapon hundreds of times more powerful than Little Boy.

Y-12 continues to manufacture secondaries—the core of US nuclear weapons—today.

August 6 in Oak Ridge

For more than thirty years, OREPA has marked August 6 in Oak Ridge with events that look back in commemoration and actions that look forward in hope. We have marched, sang, demonstrated, sometimes gotten arrested. Throughout, we have had one common message, echoing the voices of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors, hibakusha, who have joined us in Oak Ridge: Never again!

This year will be no different. We will gather early in the morning on Saturday, August 6, for the Names and Remembrance Ceremony, a solemn reading of names and accounts of that morning in Hiroshima in 1945 as well as reflections on the effects of the bombing. The ceremony begins at 6:00am and lasts until 9:00am.

After a break, we will gather at Alvin K Bissell Park in Oak Ridge at 10:30 for a rally for nuclear abolition with music, theater, and a celebration of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The Emancipators have been tapped to provide music for the gathering which will last until 12:30 when we will begin a march to the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex.

When we arrive at Y-12 (likely around 1:15), we will conduct a brief action in recognition of the Ban Treaty which confirms that, in the eyes of the world, the work at Y-12 is in violation of international law.

Remembering Nagasaki

Three days after Hiroshima was destroyed, the US dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki, killing tens of thousands instantly, and consigning tens of thousands more to intense, relentless suffering from burns and radiation sickness, and to deep psychological scarring from they horrors witnessed on that day.

OREPA will mark Nagasaki Day on Tuesday, August 9, with a Peace Lantern Ceremony at the far west end of Sequoyah Hills Park in Knoxville. The Ceremony will take place in the open field next to the west end parking lot off Cherokee Boulevard, and it will begin at 8:00pm.

We are hoping to return to pre-covid activities—a ceremony with drumming and chanting, music, Japanese folk dancing, and Japanese shadow puppets, followed by the launching of peace lanterns into the Tennessee River.

The Peace Lantern ceremony typically concludes shortly after 9:00pm, and it is family friendly.

BUT—peace lanterns don’t build themselves! This year we will once again be hosted by the Riverside Catholic Worker community at 4627 Martin Mill Pike in South Knoxville for a peace lantern building party. All materials will be provided—all you need to bring is a bit of creativity and active fingers!

The lantern building party will be on Saturday, August 6 at 6:30pm. There will be a variety of jobs available—decorating the paper that will wrap around the lanterns, drilling bases, assembling the lanterns—something for everyone!
News Cycle in a Culture of Violence, 2022
Jay McMahan

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.
~ Bill of Rights

A well regulated militia buys 375 rounds on his 18th birthday.
At the top of the hour, how many well regulated officers does it take to change a light bulb?
First a feel good story, Jenna Bush tours a nuclear submarine to honor our heroes.

A well regulated militia draws a map of a grocery story.
Today at noon, how long does it take a well regulated officer to get off a man’s neck?
Now to sports, a capacity crowd cheers as Covid overtakes Early Voting in the home stretch.

A well regulated militia buys two AR platforms and fires an F-150 into a school yard.
Tonight at six, how many well regulated officers does it take to open a door?
Next the weather, thin blue lines and stars and bars sweep across the hinterlands.

A well regulated militia uploads a 187-page manifesto into his rifle.
Tonight at ten, how many good guys with a gun does it take to regulate a well regulated militia?
In local news, Chattanooga mayor says two mass shootings is two too many.

The rights of free people to identify their children’s bodies shall be infringed.
Tomorrow on Today, how many well regulated militias have opened fire this week?
After the break, being necessary to the security of a free state, we hear both sides of the debate.

Your non-tax dollars at work!

That’s right! Every gift to OREPA is tax-deductible and it’s a dollar not being spent to fund the war machine! In March, we sent out an appeal letter that focused on our Next Generation Fund—a special account set up to underwrite organizing in the under-30 demographic.

One of the great things we’ve been able to do is put Cody Dishner to work, and he is taking OREPA to places we haven’t been before!

In April, Cody took OREPA’s message to etsucon, a pop culture convention at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. Tabling at etsucon gave Cody a chance to talk to students and others there.

We’re excited, and we’re looking forward to connecting with more people as covid loosens its grip.

The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance is a grassroots nonprofit organization working to educate and organize people about nuclear weapons production in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We advocate an end to weapons production and we work to create and nurture nonviolent community in East Tennessee.

OREPA’s newsletter is printed four times a year by Ullrich Printing in Knoxville, Tennessee and is on-line at orepa.org. Contributions to OREPA’s work may be sent to P O Box 5743, Oak Ridge, TN 37831 or may be made securely on-line at OREPA’s web site: www.orepa.org. All gifts to OREPA are tax deductible.
When I was brought on board to be OREPA’s Community Organizer I started with a clean slate. I’m not a Knoxville native and everything I knew about OREPA was from the website and questions I asked during the interview process.

When I started work, I was welcomed with open arms. Long time OREPA supporters spoke to me about the creation of OREPA, its goals and values that still haven’t changed. Board members talked about what drove them to champion nuclear abolition. I was shown pictures and told stories of people crossing the Y-12 blue line and getting arrested because they felt the call to do so.

I’ve lived all over the world but even in all my travels I’ve never met an organization so fully committed to grassroots organizing and still championing the same issues it shouldered thirty years ago.

One of OREPA’s secret strengths is the creativity of its members. We have painters, musicians, poets, and even tradesmen and women all within our organization.

But with that said, people don’t support us because we’re creative. They support us because they believe in the work we do.

As I speak to other progressive groups in the Knoxville area, they always stress how much the work we do means to them. To someone like me who only recently joined OREPA, it’s truly amazing to hear people outside of the organization speak at length about what OREPA does. It shows not only the impact of our work but the longevity it has.

OREPA has thirty years of good will built up within the progressive community here in Knoxville, but every longtime OREPA supporter I have spoken to says the largest problem facing OREPA is the lack of a youth movement to our cause. It’s an assessment that I agree with and made my number one priority.

Since joining OREPA, I’ve been connected with people and organizations all over the world organizing around the same issues that we do. Organizations like ICAN, The Ban Treaty Collaborative, and the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability—all of them working to engage a new youth movement on nuclear abolition and the larger goal of eliminating nuclear weapons.

OREPA is the intersection of all these things. We are 30 years of history, we are people crossing the blue line, we’re artists, we’re grassroots organizers, we’re part of the progressive Knoxville community, we’re part of the international movement to eliminate nuclear weapons, and we’re not done growing.