



Averting a war with Iran

13 March 2012

A war with Iran, to which a military attack would inevitably lead, would be a disaster for the whole world and any talk of a pre-emptive attack must be challenged as illegal and immoral.

We must face the unresolved issue of Iran's civilian nuclear programme, to which it is entitled, and the fears that this will develop into a nuclear weapons programme, which would violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran has not, unlike North Korea, withdrawn from this Treaty. But this is not an issue to be judged on its own. Signatories to that Treaty, of which Britain is one, promised to eliminate their own nuclear weapons. Further, in 1996 the International Court of Justice ruled that there is an obligation on nuclear weapon states* to negotiate the abolition of nuclear weapons and to bring such negotiations to a successful conclusion.

In solidarity with the people of Iran and all peoples potentially threatened by nuclear weapons through accident, misunderstandings or deliberate use, we suggest the following as a way forward.

That the British government lead by the best example by

- ceasing its preparation of a new generation of nuclear weapons. Far from negotiating elimination of these weapons Britain is planning to build yet another generation of nuclear weapons to follow Trident, at a cost of billions of pounds which would be far better spent on the real needs of our people.
- showing the transparency it seeks in Iran with regard to allowing international inspections of our own nuclear plants and facilities.
- lifting sanctions on Iran when we see signs of progress.
- employing every diplomatic means both nationally and through the EU and the UN to make the possession of nuclear weapons by any state illegal.
- calling on Israel to officially admit to having a nuclear arsenal, the existence of which is beyond any doubt.
- working to **demilitarise the region through a sustained programme of conventional and nuclear disarmament and in particular to create a Nuclear Weapons Free Middle East. This is to be discussed at the forthcoming UN Middle East Nuclear Free Zone conference which all countries should support. Such a Zone will mean that nuclear-armed ships from other states do not patrol in the Middle East area.

- Supporting efforts to establish common regional structures that ensure the security needs of all states to build a common, sustainable security.

We offer this as Pax Christi, an international Catholic movement for peace. The peace we seek cannot come from weaponry, but from a commitment to justice and nonviolent actions which recognise the dignity of every human person and all creation. We reject models of security that rely on fear, the demonisation of others or on the strength of arms - conventional and nuclear.

We affirm the words of Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations speaking in 2011. *“Proliferation is a real and serious challenge. However, non-proliferation efforts will only be effective if they are universal. The nuclear-weapon states must abide by their obligations to negotiate the total elimination of their own arsenals if they are to have any authenticity in holding the non-nuclear states to their commitments not to pursue nuclear weapons.....”*

Notes:

* Nuclear weapons states: United States, France, India, Russia China, Pakistan, Britain, Israel, North Korea.

** It is now confirmed that a third American carrier battle-group will join the two on station in the region as the *USS Enterprise* flotilla heads east around the end of February . The existing groups - centred on the *USS Carl Vinson* and the *USS Abraham Lincoln* - have been on station for only a few weeks; this means that the US navy can call on all three battle-groups at least until June-July 2012, and in addition has yet another group available at short notice from its Pacific fleet. The French carrier-strike group centred on the *Charles de Gaulle* is also expected in the region.

As if this concentration of forces was not enough, Israeli sources claim that major US troop contingents are being added to those already in western Gulf states. They include air-force and army units deployed to the large base close to the northern tip of Masirah island in Oman. (*Paul Rogers, Professor in the Department of Peace Studies, Bradford University, writing in Open Democracy, 16 February 2012*)