

## Religious diplomacy promotes peace



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The president of Iran and the US secretary of state made early headlines at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference in New York with a volley of accusations over nuclear development and nuclear weapons.

However, for the members of a World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation pursuing peace and human security goals at the conference the event, which opened Monday in New York, started with a more constructive air.

The US secretary of state, Hilary Clinton, for example, promised that the US would reveal how many nuclear weapons it has. That information will finally answer a call heard since the days of the Cold War from many quarters, including the WCC.

Clinton also said the US would provide legal assurances against nuclear attack to members of a new treaty that protects Africa. WCC member churches also helped put the new treaty protecting Africa in place recently. The US made the same promise to the countries of the South Pacific.

The South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone is another achievement churches helped which had not been fully recognized by the nuclear powers. The actions meet requests the WCC representatives would have made when they meet with the US delegation in New York. With the addition of Africa in 2009, such zones now cover all of the Southern Hemisphere and virtually all of the Global South.

Members of the WCC delegation are the Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the Rev. Dr Gunnar Stalsett, moderator of Religions for Peace and former bishop of Oslo, and Dr Ninan Koshy, a current events commentator and international affairs analyst.

Another positive sign is that after years of work – mostly by civil society groups including churches – a majority of the governments represented in New York are now in favour of starting work on a nuclear weapons convention.

While the NPT was designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and someday reverse it, the proposed convention would ban them completely. The first country to address the NPT conference, Indonesia speaking on behalf of the non-aligned movement, took up the call. Churches on five continents have joined WCC and a wider civil society effort to promote a nuclear weapons convention at the NPT conference.

Hundreds of survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are also in New York, part of 2,000 Japanese Buddhists and Christians who have come determined to put the human face on nuclear danger through demonstrations and workshops.

An atomic relic has come with them, the head of a statue of Mary the mother of Jesus, found in the rubble of Nagasaki's Roman Catholic cathedral after the US attack. Her scorched cheek and empty eyes looked out on an overflow crowd at New York's St Patrick's Cathedral during Mass on Sunday, 2 April, and then on an inter-faith service at the church centre where the WCC has its UN office.

The archbishop of Nagasaki brought the relic to the NPT conference. It rarely leaves Japan. "Along with the now elderly A-bomb survivors, this Mary helps bring the suffering of the Japanese people to governments and people here," a WCC representative told the Japanese broadcaster NHK.

Nearly every government at the conference and at two days of preparatory meetings on nuclear-weapon-free zones has stressed the urgent need for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

The issue, a long-standing NPT commitment, is also addressed in ecumenical policy and current work. A panel on lessons learned from existing zones included a report of WCC experience in Africa and its relevance to situation in the Middle East. Many participants think that, if unresolved, frustration over the lack of progress on the Middle East zone is enough to sink this NPT conference.

The UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon came to New York's historic Riverside Church for a large civil society conference leading up to the NPT conference, 1 April. "You who have pledged to keep your ground free of nuclear weapons," he said, "you are leading by example. Our goal, my goal, is to make the whole world a nuclear-weapon-free zone."

Nearly 200 governments, 121 NGOs and thousands of demonstrators are in New York for the conference which began Monday, 3 May and ends 28 May.

WCC project: Churches engaged for nuclear arms control: [www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=44f52a88e11933cacadd](http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=44f52a88e11933cacadd)

WCC Central Committee, September 2009: Statement of hope in a year of opportunity: seeking a nuclear-weapon-free world: [www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=4826f97543623ad6482e](http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=4826f97543623ad6482e)

NCCCUSA release, 2 May 2010: Nuclear weapons "must be removed from the face of the earth" [www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=3bcbccda494867ebdee7](http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?RDCT=3bcbccda494867ebdee7)

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=16079>

