



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

February 2023

Government taken to court (again!) over arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

In 2019, CAAT asked the High Court to rule that UK provision of armaments to Saudi is in breach of our arms control rules. The High Court agreed with CAAT and told the government to stop. Liz Truss decided to resume sales on the basis that any breaches of International Humanitarian Law were "isolated incidents".

Since the start of the war with Yemen in 2015, there have been 8,983 civilian deaths with airstrikes hitting hospitals, funerals, weddings and residential homes.

The case has just recently come back to court and we await the outcome.

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This month's meeting: Tuesday, 21st February 8pm online

Mayors for Peace

Our speaker this month is Richard Outram, secretary of the UK/Ireland chapter of Mayors for Peace, an international organisation initiated in 1982 by the then Mayor of Hiroshima and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only cities in the world to have suffered a nuclear bomb attack.



Richard Outram (pictured above with the mayor of Oldham at a tree-planting ceremony at Oasis Academy Oldham) has just been to Hiroshima & Nagasaki as a guest of their Mayors, and will tell us about his visit, about his work with Mayors for Peace, and how Abingdon & other towns can get involved.

In 2011 the Mayor of Abingdon formally expressed the town's support for nuclear abolition, and Abingdon has remained on the list of Mayors for Peace ever since, joining Oxford and Reading. In November 2022 Salisbury City Council also voted to join. We have invited the Mayor of Abingdon and his counterparts in our Twin Towns to join us online for this meeting.

More on Mayors for Peace: <https://www.mayorsforpeace.org/en/>

To join our Zoom meeting, click this link any time after 7.30pm:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>

Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836 . You can also join by phone: email abingdonpeace@gmail.com for help.

Abingdon Peace Group Yearly Review 2022 compiled by Barbara Micklem.

The monthly meetings have been mostly held on zoom while COVID has kept us apart.

January

In January, we discussed the Holocaust when the world was marking Holocaust Memorial Day. Our speakers were Daniel Scharf, whose father was a survivor of the Holocaust, and Rebecca Tinsley, who talked about factors leading to genocide with reference to Rwanda and Darfur.

February

Rana Ibrahim spoke of Iraqi women in art and war, working and living in Oxfordshire, catching their surviving war stories through art. From CND we were offered a digital toolkit, Talks Not Bombs, to help us all campaign.

Since Putin's troops invaded Ukraine, Abingdon Peace Group have been at the war memorial in the high street every Monday morning, for an anti-war vigil. We committed to be there until the war finishes, very visible to morning traffic and school buses.

March

Virginia Moffat spoke on Peace Activism in times of war. The Abingdon Climate Emergency Centre opened recently, acting as a meeting point for those working to address climate questions.

April

We watched a recording of Professor Paul Rogers speaking online about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The question he posed was, have nuclear weapons really kept the peace?

Several APG members were involved in an MAW exhibition & event at Cornerstone Art Centre in Didcot on "The Glorious Art of Peace".

May

Colin Archer talked about war, law, and cash. Among the questions posed were the right to self-defense; the meaning of solidarity; and the experience of empire and humiliation. Colin Archer co-founded the Global Campaign on Military Spending in 2011 and focuses his work on this.

June

We marked the death of fellow peace campaigner and political activist, Bruce Kent. We will all miss his encouragement. John Gittings spoke to us on the question, "Can diplomacy prevent a longer war in Ukraine?"

At the Jubilee Meadow Festival, Abingdon Peace Group had a stall advertising our activities.

July

ICAN encouraged us to get our councils to support preventing a long war in Ukraine.

August

Remembering Hiroshima with a vigil at the War Memorial and a picnic at our Peace Tree in Abbey Meadow.

September

We had a discussion & watched a film on the fight to free Julian Assange.

October

A meeting together in the Northcourt Centre. We watched the film of the Scottish organisation, Peace & Justice. Paul Rogers was the main speaker on Ukraine. We also heard the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, Yurii Sheliashenko, online from Kyiv, as well as Vijay Prashad, director of Tricontinental Institute for Social Research and fellow at Renmin University of China.

The annual Croughton Peace Campaign was cancelled. Our annual jumble sale raised £250.

November

We discussed nuclear power and nuclear weapons - twin evils. Rowland Dye, a physicist turned activist, was the main speaker.

December

We discussed global peace & security in Ukraine.

Annual Christmas party & quiz.

Throughout the year, much thought and discussion has been given to the climate and peace campaigns. Scientists say that we have only a few years to stop the planet warming above 1.5°C. Let us all hope for strength in the year ahead, and our actions will bring benefits.

Abingdon Peace Group AGM Tuesday 17th January 2023 held at Northcourt Centre

10 people were present for our AGM. Barbara presented the review of the year, and Denise the accounts which are healthy.

The following officers were re-elected:

- Co-chairs: Mike Bloom, Tony Godfrey, Anne Dodd.
- Forward Planning Group members: Sally Mears, Barbara Micklem, Oonagh Godfrey.
- Treasurer: Denise Watt
- Secretary: Sally Reynolds
- Membership Secretary: Sally Reynolds
- Refreshments: Barbara Micklem, David Huish
- Newsletter editor: *vacant*
- Newsletter production: *vacant*
- Newsletter distribution: David Huish, Tim & Sally Reynolds, Denise Watt, Richard Smart

Report by Sally Reynolds. The full minutes are available on request.

Report of our January Meeting by Mike Bloom

In January we gave our attention to the plight of Yemen and its causes. This involved looking at Saudia Arabia briefly, its policies in conjunction with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and with the UK. Unapologetically, we shared the perspective of CAAT (Campaign Against the Arms Trade).

We saw three videos. The first two were very brief, but set the scene for us effectively and tersely: "Solidarity with Yemen - impact of UK arms trade" <https://youtu.be/nPZtUxEGpW4> ;and "Since the Arab Spring: Yemen" https://youtu.be/r4VUXwe3d_8.

Finally, we watched a sixteen minute extract from a talk from a longer CAAT video, "Saudi Arabia, Human Rights & the Arms Trade" given by from a talk by Andrew Feinstein on the involvement of the UK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_8imX2k6cE Andrew hails from South Africa and in fact served as a minister in the Nelson Mandela government. He is an astonishingly incisive speaker and produced information and made observations that were surely new to many of us.

Since 2015 the Saudi/UAE attacks on Yemen have intensified, the airwar conducted by Saudi, the shipping blockades with their vicious effects by the UAE. Some 20,000 Yemenis have died (probably more), and hunger, lack of shelter are the consequences os the attacks, exacerbated by the absence of a health service. And much of the targeting of civilians is frequent and intentional, not so called 'collateral damage'. Andrew described this as being perceived by expert observers as the worst humanitarian disaster this century and by some indeed as the worst since 1900.

Andrew commented that Saudi is motivated by a desire the buy western politicians and gave facts and figures from previous arms deals indicating huge kickbacks to the Saudi royals, from which they bought expensive luxuries for some of our leaders. The deals also acted as a way of getting money into western (British?) banks – in other words they were a means of money laundering.

If you missed the meeting do follow the links given. Additional links:<https://caat.org.uk/> Andrew also recommended the website Declassified UK for its regular coverage, for instance <https://declassifieduk.org/uk-loaned-military-adviser-to-british-un-envoy-in-yemen/>

On 15 February 2003, peace groups around the world held coordinated protests in over 600 cities to voice their opposition to the imminent US-led invasion of Iraq. In London, over 1 million people took to the streets for a demonstration organised by CND, Stop the War Coalition, and the Muslim Association of Britain.

To mark the 20th anniversary of these protests, the **International Peace Bureau is hosting a series of events on 15 and 16 February 2023** to discuss lessons learned and what can be applied to today's challenges. You can register [here](#).

The “Path of MADness” - remembering the Holocaust. Report by Sarah Westcott.

Sue, Fran, Ali, Daniel and I represented SeaGreenSingers at the 'Path of MADness' event today at Upper Heyford. It was a powerful experience. A time for reflection was held in an empty hangar, that once held an F1-11 fighter jet that could be armed with nuclear bombs. The acoustic in the hangar is incredible and we filled it with 'We want peace, justice and peace, no more war, war no more' and 'We will remember'. Several people read or spoke their contributions and then we walked down and back up the 2 miles of runway. It was cold and bleak but the sun came out towards the end of our walk and we had to see it as a sign of hope. Two magnificent swans flew over us and we saw them as our doves of peace.

N.B. Daniel Scharf has the words of all the contributions used in the service. For a copy, email him on pause.forthought@gmail.com

GOOD NEWS on Cameroon? Report by Anne Dodd.

As individuals and as a Peace Group we have done what we could to raise the profile of the civil war in Cameroon. At last there is some tentative good news. The extract below is from an article by Rebecca Tinsley, who has been a speaker at previous Peace Group meetings. For the full article contact Anne on peteranne@aol.com.

Religious leaders in Anglophone Cameroon are calling for an immediate ceasefire to ensure Canada-led peace talks are successful. The Archbishop of Bamenda has been joined by leaders of the Baptist, Anglican and Presbyterian churches, in addition to mosques in Buea and Bamenda, issuing a joint call welcoming Canada's initiative.

On January 20, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly announced talks including the Yaoundé government and several non-state armed groups and separatist representatives. Ottawa's bid to resolve the war in Cameroon follows attempts by Switzerland and the Vatican to bring about peace talks.

Launching the initiative, Canada said the agreement to enter a formal process was a "critical first step toward peace and a safer, more inclusive and prosperous future for civilians affected by the conflict."

The faith leaders call on the international community to sustain its interest in finding a resolution to the crisis for the common good of the Cameroonian people.

Background to the Anglophone Conflict

In 2016, the Francophone-dominated central government tried to impose French judges on the English common law system in the Anglophone regions. Yaoundé also attempted to force French-speaking teachers on schools that traditionally teach in English using a British curriculum. When lawyers and teachers protested, their peaceful demonstrations were met with what international human rights monitors describe as disproportionate force by the Cameroonian security forces. As the government cracked down on civilians, armed separatist fighters emerged, demanding a country based on the borders of the Anglophone-dominated territory.

Violence by all sides has escalated throughout the conflict. As a result, the economy and livelihoods have deteriorated, individuals have been arbitrarily detained, kidnapped and ransomed, mutilated and tortured, traumatized and killed by separatist fighters and security services, with villages burned and schools targeted with impunity. The UN estimates that the violence has claimed more than 6,000 lives and has kept 600,000 children out of school, and at least 800,000 people have fled their homes, surviving as internally displaced persons and refugees.

The Weapons of Diplomacy. Submitted by Anne

"We cannot resign ourselves to the fact that the war in Ukraine will continue for a long time and, even if at the moment there seems to be no basis for any negotiations, we must keep alive the ideal of peace and the idea that this war will end, even if it will not be the end imagined by President Zelensky or President Putin. We want a just peace, but a peace must come, and to do this, if necessary, we must also begin to 'think the unthinkable.'"

Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States and International Organisations, made that observation on Thursday at a conference entitled: "The Weapons of Diplomacy. Dialogue between the Holy See and Europe in the face of war."

The event was organized by the network of Italian UNESCO chairs ReCui and held at Palazzo Altemps in Rome, which was also attended by former European Commission President, Romano Prodi.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-01/archbishop-gallagher-on-ukraine-we-must-aim-for-ideal-of-peace.html>



Anne had a new placard for our vigil on January 16th at the War Memorial.

The Doomsday Clock moves forward 10 seconds!

from articles in iNews (Nick Duffy on 24 Jan 2023) & The Guardian. Contributed by Anne Dodd.

The [Doomsday Clock](#) has been set at 90 seconds to midnight, putting humanity closer to oblivion than at any time in its history, as scientists cited the risk of [Vladimir Putin using nuclear weapons in Ukraine](#) and possible catastrophic disruptions from [climate change](#).

It has moved forward 10 seconds from 2022, when weeks before Russia's invasion of Ukraine it was held at 100 seconds to midnight, the level first set in 2020.

The clock, which [represents the risk](#) of a man-made global disaster such as nuclear war or climate catastrophe, has been set every year since 1947 by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, with input from scientists and security experts on threats to human existence.

The current setting of 90 seconds to midnight is the closest the world has ever been to annihilation – surpassing the setting of two minutes to midnight seen in 1952 as the US and Soviet Union tested thermonuclear weapons. Its furthest setting from midnight, 17 minutes to midnight, came at the end of the Cold War in 1991.

[A statement accompanying the decision](#) said: "Russia's war on Ukraine has raised profound questions about how states interact, eroding norms of international conduct that underpin successful responses to a variety of global risks. And worst of all, Russia's thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict – by accident, intention, or miscalculation – is a terrible risk."

"The possibility that the conflict could spin out of anyone's control remains high," the statement went on, adding that the Russian invasion had placed the [Chornobyl](#) and [Zaporizhzhia nuclear reactor](#) sites in the midst of a war zone, in violation of international protocols and risked the "widespread release of radioactive materials".

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists website has a more hopeful message though: *An often-forgotten aspect of the Doomsday Clock is that it can be turned back. We want to hear your thoughts on how this might be done. Share your ideas to social media with the tag #TurnBackTheClock. We'll be featuring some of the posts on our website.*

Join the #TurnBackTheClock challenge! Read more at <https://thebulletin.org/>



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

National demonstration

PEACE TALKS NOW - STOP THE WAR IN UKRAINE

No to nuclear war - No to the Russian invasion - No to NATO

- Saturday, 25th February 2023
- Assemble 12 noon, Portland Place, London
- Rally at Trafalgar Square




More information on speakers at the rally on CND's [website](#). Spread the word by sharing the Facebook [event](#). For any queries, please contact enquiries@cnd.uk.org.

Ahead of the demonstration, the IPB is hosting a webinar on Friday, 24 Feb, see more on cnduk.org/events or click the link below.

Diary

Tues, 21/02/23 - 8pm Mayors for Peace. Online APG meeting. See front page.

Fri, 24/02/2023 - 12:00 “365 Days of War in Ukraine: Prospects Towards Peace in 2023” – international webinar by International Peace Bureau in cooperation with Peace in Ukraine Coalition (USA), Movement de la Paix (France) and CND (UK) Register & more information [here](#).

Sat, 25/02/2023 - 12:00 CND National Demonstration For Peace in Ukraine. Assemble 12 noon, Portland Place, London (opposite the BBC) (See leaflet above).

Wed, 01/03/2023 (All day) Resisting War and Sanctions in Iraq (1991 – 2003), with Kathy Kelly, part of the series: 'The Iraq War 20 years on'. Register at <https://peacenews.info/events>

Fri, 03/03/2023- 2.30pm World Day of Prayer St Michael's Church, Park Road – devised by the women of Taiwan.

Wed, 08/03/2023 (All day) International Women's Day.

Thu, 09/03/2023 - 19:00 The War We Nearly Stopped: Iraq 2003, with Milan Rai. Register on Zoom: <https://www.tinyurl.com/peacenews3959>

Fri, 21/04/23 onwards ‘Choose Your Future’ – Houses of Parliament – An Invitation from XR to contribute our strength and experience on 21st April 2023 to surround Westminster with demands for a sustainable future. <https://xrpeace.org/2022/12/23/april-2023-surround-westminster-with-demands-for-a-sustainable-future/> There will be coaches. Put it in your diary now!

This edition of the newsletter has been produced by a collective.

If you would like to join the team or contribute words or IT skills, please get in touch!

Corrections and contributions to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August, either on Zoom or at Northcourt Centre, Abingdon OX14 1NS. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations.

Contact us on abingdonpeace@gmail.com, 07786 055195 or (01235) 526265 & 522163.