

The Weapons of Mass Destruction Awareness Programme and Student/ Young Pugwash UK involvement

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In 2002, members of several British organisations came together, under the aegis of Nobel Peace Laureate Prof. Rotblat, to develop a programme to raise public awareness on the danger of present nuclear weapons and WMD related policies. The aim of this programme is to 'shift public perception towards the feasibility of a secure world free from the threat of nuclear weapons'. Since then, research on public opinion was conducted and a proper communication strategy was developed. The programme was divided in several elements, which were elaborated and implemented over the past three years. These are: a website (to be a clearing-house of information on NW/WMD); a series of events across UK cities bringing together influential speakers and/or celebrities/media personalities; the creation of a security curriculum (focused on NW/WMD) to be inserted in the Citizen Curriculum; the development of communication with Members of Parliament in order to bring the debate back into politics; the linking with other similar organisations in Europe, the US and worldwide to broaden the initiative. In this context, each collaborating organisation participates according to its expertises and possibilities. The programme was officially launched in September 2004 in London by a public lecture from former President M. Gorbachev, receiving since then positive feedbacks. Other events followed this launch in order to keep the momentum going. Student/Young Pugwash UK joined the programme in January 2003 and since then contributed, according to its capability, to raise awareness among the students. The different local groups organised lectures, working groups (at the Student/Young Pugwash UK Annual Conference) and workshops regarding NW/WMD related issues. Since its beginning, the programme made great strides, which constitute an enormous stimulus to continue the programme's implementation.

In the new millennium, the unchallenged existence of vast nuclear arsenals [1] (mainly in the United States and Russia), with a total yield equal to several hundreds of thousands times the Hiroshima bomb, constitutes a serious threat to human civilisation and ultimately to life on Earth itself. Amazingly, after the end of the Cold War, the awareness of such threat faded away

from public interest and at present is largely ignored by the majority of the population. In the UK (one of the five nuclear weapon states), regular opinion polls [2] conducted monthly since 1983 represent very well this phenomena: since 1993 the nuclear weapon (NW) issue is seen as a priority by less than 1% of the population [3], while in 1983, just ten years earlier, about 40% of the population considered it to be the first priority. Indeed, in the western world, despite a generalised opposition to NW [4], the public opinion is for the most part disinterested and unaware about NW and WMD related domestic and international policies. Western governments, led by the US, still rely very much on these weapons not just as a political tool, but also as strategic and military means [5]. Furthermore, the shift in US nuclear policies, summarised by the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review [6], is quite worrisome as it may lead to test resumption and a new arms race, involving declared and non-declared nuclear weapon States [7].

Affront of this dangerous international situation, in the year 2002 members of several British organisations [8] came together, under the aegis of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Prof. Sir Joseph Rotblat, to develop a programme in the UK named Weapon of Mass Destruction Awareness programme (WMDAP). Its aim is to promote 'public awareness of the present danger of nuclear weapon policies' and to 'shift public perception towards the feasibility of a secure world free from the threat of nuclear weapon'. Student/Young Pugwash UK was invited to join the programme and decided to do so in January 2003 at the National Conference in Cambridge.

In the initial phases of the programme, representatives of the participating organisations discussed and defined programme objectives, basic elements, and strategies. The following were identified as the programme's strategic objectives:

1. Educate a significant percentage of UK public about the perils of current NW/WMD policies;
2. Raise the NW/WMD issues higher up the political agenda;
3. Shape the public debate on NW issues to increase pressure on the UK government to fulfil its obligations under the NPT;
4. Encourage and facilitate expansion of the programme to Europe, the US and worldwide.

The formulation of a communication strategy was identified to be a crucial element for the programme. Indeed, in a context of limited availability of funds, it was believed that it was extremely important to identify and deliver an effective message, capable of exciting media and public interest, using cost effective means. This required further research on public opinion and media to map the current opinion on NW and WMD. The research was conducted in stages with the help of specialised public relations agencies [9]. The results, besides confirming the general lack of interest of public opinion on NW and WMD, pinpointed some important areas of optimism around which to build the programme's communication strategy. One of these was the importance of linking the nuclear issue to more general public concerns, such as environmental issues, terrorism, intercultural-clash, globalisation and proper use of national (financial) resources. The research also underlined how important it is to remind people of the horrific consequences of a nuclear war but at the same time to offer a hopeful and positive way out. Clear advantages derive also from keeping the arguments simple: they are better understood and taken as their own, increasing the chance to propagate by themselves (go 'viral'). The nuclear debate has to be taken away from the Cold War bi-polar issue and reframed around

contemporary and live issues. The key message is that we are entitled to a choice on the nuclear issue and that ‘to create real security in the 21st century we need to find and neutralise all WMD and build security through international treaties and negotiation’. It is also crucial to develop a communication strategy addressing the population’s fears and concerns using communication methods likely to resonate within specific groups to get them involved. It was also reminded how critical it was to avoid, at least in the initial stages of a public opinion campaign, any reference to nuclear disarmament, which is likely to alienate public interest but rather, as already mentioned, to relate NW and WMD more pressing public concerns, as terrorism, use of financial resources, environmental issues, etc.

Extremely important results came out of the research’s final stages [10], as it was indicated that the population could be divided in three broad groups, depending on their attitude towards NW and WMD. These groups are: *Abolitionists* (2-5% of population), convinced that NW have always been and are a live issue, likely to support peace/disarmament organisations; *Sceptics* (15%), highly concerned at global insecurity and at belligerence of the US and UK, lacking trust on politicians, but not necessarily believing in nuclear disarmament; *Resigned* (80-85%), unlikely to be engaged in political discussion, convinced that security issues are business of experts and politicians and nuclear weapons are a necessary evil. Since the programme is more likely to gain the interest of the Sceptics, it was decided to focus it (at least at this stage) on this particular population group.

The programme’s basic elements were elaborated in the light of the research outcomes. They included: the development and launch of a website that can be a clearing-house of information on NW/WMD issues for all target audiences; the launch of the programme nationally by a series of events across UK cities, bringing together influential speakers, celebrities/media personalities/musicians; the design of a security curriculum, focused on nuclear weapons, to be inserted in the Citizen Curriculum, so to work with teachers and students to raise awareness within the classroom; the development of communications with Members of Parliament in order to bring the debate back into politics; the linking up with other similar organisations in Europe, the US and worldwide to circulate the results of our research and share our programme of actions in order to encourage similar initiatives. It was also agreed that in this context, each collaborating organisation participates in a way that makes use of their own particular expertise as well as sharing responsibility for the achievement of the programme’s objectives.

During the past three years, the generous and passionate work of the WMDAP members led to developing those elements. The programme was launched in London on the 23rd of September 2004 by a public meeting hosting a lecture from Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and former USSR President M. Gorbachev. The lecture was well attended and had a warm response, catching the interest of domestic and international media (especially in the US). In his address ‘Global Security in the 21st Century’, President Gorbachev reiterated the need to achieve national security through different means. He also underlined how important is to involve the civil society in the nuclear debate in order to accomplish the disarmament objectives stated in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) [11]. A visit to a North London school by President Gorbachev was organised and he received an enthusiastic response from pupils and teachers. What could be a better way to promote awareness on WMD related dangers among youngsters? Video material on President Gorbachev’s visit to London was recorded and a video (DVD) will be

produced as a future reference on the event. Possibly such a video will be available for circulation among participating organisations so as to help on diffusing the WMDAP message.

The web site was prepared and named *Come Clean* [12]. It went live on the night of 22nd of September and was presented at the President Gorbachev WMDAP launch event. Following its launch, the website received a large number of hits and many positive comments. The possibility to monitor the number of hits following international or WMDAP related events also provides us with a good means to take the public opinion pulse. The website is characterised by a clean and welcoming design and it is aimed specially to a young audience. Divided in several sections, it presents in a clear manner the basic information on WMD, with links to other websites for those interested on deeper investigations. It has been designed to be highly interactive so as to stimulate the user's interest. It contains on-line competitions, quizzes and fun games. The section 'Tell us a Secret' merits a special mention, as it aims to share and verify information and promote direct involvement of the public in local/specific WMD related issues. It also contains all the necessary information to join or support the programme. The website is frequently updated in order to keep the resources fresh at all times.

Regarding educational material, a six lesson plan has been developed with the help of professional consultants and teachers and it is now ready to be tested in volunteer pilot schools during the next school year. The lesson plan, aimed at 14-16 years old pupils, looks at conflicts, conflict resolution, democratic processes, media and public awareness with special focus on WMD and in particular on NW. It provides guidance for teachers of Citizen Curriculum, with background information, suggested activities, maps, cards, and cartoons to stimulate the discussion. Several websites are also suggested to satisfy deeper interests. With this programme element there was also the opportunity to implement the recommendations of the UN Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation [13]. The lessons were made available for free download on the *Come Clean* website in order to encourage a wider distribution. During the next academic year, workshops with teachers will be held to explain to them our approach to global security and receive their comments and suggestions. The material will be then modified and improved according to the feedback of teachers, so it will be ready to be used widely the following year.

Efforts have been made during the past three years to establish links with other organisations with similar goals. Indeed, close links were established with the Mayors for Peace campaign [14], led by the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This permits us to share views and ideas and to maximise the impact of each other's events by mutual collaboration. The NPT 2005 Review Conference in New York was attended by Carol Naughton, WMDA Programme Co-ordinator, on behalf of the programme. In this occasion the programme was officially presented to other NGO's and the UN, receiving a warm welcome.

Once the programme has been launched it is very important to keep the momentum going. In February 2005, Senator Douglas Roche, former Canadian Disarmament Ambassador and Chairman of the Middle Power Initiative [15], visited the UK. The British Pugwash group hosted, on behalf of the programme, a public meeting with a lecture from Sen. Roche and Alyn Ware (Global Coordinator of the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament). During his visit in London, Sen. Roche held meetings with the All Party Non-Proliferation Group in order to promote the awareness on NW issues among parliamentarians.

In the last month of June it organised the participation of Mr. McNamara in the 2005 Hay Festival of Literature [16], organised by the UK newspaper 'The Guardian' [17]. The high pro-

file of Mr. McNamara, former US Secretary of Defence in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and also involved in the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of nuclear weapons [18], together with The Guardian collaboration, guaranteed an attractive media coverage and public interest. Prior to the Festival participation, Mr McNamara held a well attended press conference in London on behalf of the programme. Mr. McNamara expressed deep concern for the present situation, embracing the programme message on the urge of achieving national security by means different than NW [19].

An important activity of the programme was to establish contacts with Members of Parliament (MPs). These have been established by members of the programme and there is intense activity on promoting an inter-party debate on WMD issues. In order to link MPs with the programme, other possible activities are considered, as holding fringe meetings with Labour's MPs at the next Labour Party Conference in September.

For the foreseen future other events are being organised to commemorate the 60 years from the dropping of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. The first one is the distribution of leaflet regarding the WMDAP at the Glastonbury music festival, a very-well known event in the UK. A quiz competition, with questions regarding WMD, will be included in the leaflets. The aim of this is to publicise the Come Clean website, since participation to the competition will be made possible just through it. The massive young participation to such a festival should guarantee a large diffusion of our message among young people. The second event is a visit of two historians from the United States (Professors Peter Kuznick and Mark Selden), who will discuss once more the real reasons behind the dropping of the bomb in a public meeting. The goal of this event, organised in collaboration with Greenpeace, MEDACT, the Atomic Mirror Project and Scientists for Global Responsibility, is to dismantle one of the most common thoughts behind the rationale supporting NW, essentially that the use of the bomb was necessary and unavoidable to bring World War II to a quick end. The last one of the planned events is a Peace Concert to be held in Birmingham on the Hiroshima commemoration day, the 6th of August. During the concert, media, political, religious, and art personalities will deliver their views on global security, WMD and disarmament. Once more, the focus of this event is to promote our message among young people so to encourage their interest on NW and WMD and gain future support for the programme.

Regarding fundraising, the agreed strategy is to approach founders separately for programme core costs and specific elements (events, education material, etc.). Until now, financial support has come from different founders, such as Greenpeace UK, British and International Pugwash, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), Network for Social Change, the Institute of Law and Peace, Crysostum Fund and two generous anonymous donations. The last grant from JRCT has assured the programme financial support for the year 2005, permitting to plan the next activities/events more comfortably.

In the last part of this article the author intends to present how Student/Young Pugwash UK (SYPUK) has supported, as an organisation, the WMDAP, and also to suggest possible alternatives to support it in the future. In this context, it is important to remember that Students are a very important 'target group' for the programme, as they will be tomorrow's voters. Therefore their opinion is particularly valuable.

As Prof. Rotblat reminded us, the NW/WMD issue is historically a central topic for Pugwash [20]. In Prof. Rotblat's opinion, in this historical moment it is extremely important for Student Pugwash to get active on such an issue so to help in preventing a possible future

catastrophe involving NW or WMD. To do this, his suggestion was to return to the basis, that is, to remind the public the general principles upon which our modern society is built and to show them how NW/WMD policies violate these principles.

In respect of the Pugwash tradition to educate people, local groups are invited and encouraged to promote Awareness on WMD by seminars, lectures, open debates, movie projections, photographic exhibitions, articles on student magazines or on general press regarding WMD related issues. In this context, it is particularly significant for ourselves to get well informed on the issues so as to transmit appropriate knowledge to the public.

As a national group, Student/Young Pugwash UK (SYPUK) organises an Annual Conference for its members, also extending and welcoming the participation of members from other national groups. In the last three conferences, topics regarding WMD were debated in working groups and reports from these discussions are available on-line for public consultation [21]. They intend to provide, together with general information, the Pugwash approach to conflict and global problem resolution.

In January 2004, a study group was proposed at the 2004 National Conference at Imperial College, London. Several SYPUK members volunteered their participation and among the proposed topics it was chosen to focus on Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZ). Shortly after the Conference, the group started its research and information was shared over the web. The NWFZ topic was divided into different areas and each participant selected a particular area to analyse thoroughly. After six months the study group culminated in a workshop, held at Cambridge University in June 2004 [22]. On that occasion, the research completed by the participants was presented and debated under the supervision of an expert, Prof. Peter Nicholls, from Abolition 2000 UK [23]. Given the positive outcomes, in term of knowledge acquired and participation, similar initiatives ones are warmly encouraged, both in the UK and abroad.

In parallel, other initiatives to promote and support the programme were undertaken by the groups at Imperial College, Cambridge University and Queens & Mary University in Belfast. Lectures and debates were organised, focusing on different aspects of the WMD dangers: from the present and past threat from NW (Prof. Rotblat), to the NPT 2005 Review Conference or consequences on public health following the deployment of chemical or biological weapons [24]. Attendance at these events varied, but they all shared the same enthusiasm from the participants. In this context it appears to be valuable to have good communication among local and national groups on possible speakers as they also may become available when visiting abroad.

It is also valuable to link with other student organisations to make them aware of the WMDAP and possibly to get their support. In addition, it is this author's opinion that students' views and feedbacks about the programme are very important, as they can sparkle new energy and idea to it. The possibility to debate specific WMD related issues in research/study groups, at national or international level, seems also quite attractive and therefore it should be particularly welcomed and encouraged.

Summarising, the WMDAP, a project for promoting public awareness in the UK on the danger of present WMD policies, made great strides since it started in 2002. Developing and taking new approaches to the NW/WMD issues, it reinvigorated the concerned NGO community. Student/Young Pugwash UK, as part of this programme, has undertaken a series of initiatives, in respect of the Pugwash tradition, to support it by promoting awareness on NW/WMD issues. This is particularly valuable since students represent a very important section of the

population, therefore more initiatives are encouraged and welcomed. Since they could also be organised at national or international level, a closer collaboration between the different local and national groups would favour this possibility. In conclusion, the goods results obtained in the past three years constitute a great stimulus to continue the implementation of the WMDA programme.

Notes

1. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist 58 (6) (2002) 103-104
 2. The MORI surveys are available on-line at: <http://www.mori.com>.
 3. John Finney, UK public Attitudes to nuclear weapons and international security, paper prepared for 53rd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 17-21 July 2003.
 4. Public opinion on NW: http://www.abolition2000.org/resources/docs/poll_worldwide.pdf.
 5. Joseph Rotblat, The Nuclear Threat is Real, Address to the 3rd World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, Rome, Italy, 19-20 October 2002.
 6. Resources on the Nuclear posture Review are available at: <http://www.wslfweb.org/nukes/npr.htm>.
 7. See [5].
 8. Organisations participating to WMDAP are: Abolition 2000, Atomic Mirror, BASIC (British American Security Information Council), British Pugwash Group, CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament),
 9. Greenpeace UK, Movement for the Abolition of War, Oxford Research Group, Pax Christi, Quaker Peace, Social Witness UK, MEDACT, Student/Young Pugwash UK, VERTIC and World Court Project UK
 10. FRANK: Greenpeace/nuclear weapons – General Public Research – Debrief Report, April 2003; HOST: nuclear weapons: uncovering key insights – Workshop at Greenpeace, June 2003.
 11. John Finney and Robert Hinde, The UK WMD Awareness programme, a Report from the British Pugwash Group, consultable on-line at: <http://www.pugwash.org/uk/projects.htm>.
 12. President Gorbachev's lecture is available on-line at <http://www.comeclean.org.uk/articles.php?articleID=47>.
 13. The Come Clean website address is: <http://www.comeclean.org.uk>.
 14. The study is available at: <http://disarmament.un.org:8080/education/study.html>.
 15. Mayors for Peace website: <http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/mayors/english/campaign/2020vision.html>
 16. Middle Powers Initiative: <http://www.middlepowers.org/mpi/index.html>.
 17. Hay Festival of Literature: <http://www.hayfestival.com/2005/index.html>.
 18. The interview released by McNamara at Hay Festival can be listened to at: <http://www.hayfestival.com/2005/archive05.asp?eventid=339>
 19. Report of the Canberra Commission on the Abolition of nuclear weapons, National Capital Printers, Canberra, Australia (1996); available on-line at: <http://www.comeclean.org.uk/articles.php?articleID=29>.
 20. McNamara opinion on NW is expressed in the recently published article 'Apocalypse Now' available at: http://www.truthout.org/docs_2005/050505B.shtml.
 21. Joseph Rotblat, The UN after the Iraq: tasks for Student/Young Pugwash, ISYP Journal on Science and World Affairs (1) (1) (2005) 73-77. (This volume.)
 22. The working group report are consultable at: <http://www.student-pugwash.org/uk>.
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23. The NWFZ workshop report is consultable at: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/pugwash/enwfz.html>.
 24. Prof. Nicholls is Visiting Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Essex and former President of Science for Peace and Chairman of Abolition 2000 UK.
 25. For a more complete list of the lecture/debates organised by SYPUK local groups please refer to the their websites (links to University of Cambridge, Imperial College and Queen's University Student Pugwash group websites are available on the SYPUK website).
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