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First Minister Alex Salmond wants Scotland, UK and the World rid of nuclear weapons

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Publication date: Sunday 21 October 2007

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Salmond: help us get rid of Trident

By Rob Edwards, Environment Editor, Sunday Herald, 21 October 2007

First minister asks 122 countries to back Scotland

ALEX SALMOND has made a major bid to win international backing for his government's campaign to rid Scotland of nuclear weapons, the Sunday Herald can reveal.

The first minister has written to 122 countries highlighting the nation's opposition to the deployment of Trident nuclear warheads on the Clyde, and his determination to try and block the UK government's decision to replace Trident.

Salmond is also asking the countries to support a request for Scotland to be given observer status at future meetings of the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), an international agreement to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.

The first minister's move, on the eve of the Scottish government's Trident summit in Glasgow tomorrow, has been hailed as a potential breakthrough by disarmament experts.

Tomorrow's meeting will hear evidence from a Scottish advocate, John Mayer, that nuclear weapons are illegal under international law and the Scottish parliament would be "well within its competence" to pass legislation preventing crimes committed by weapons of mass destruction.

"The law of the whole world is against Trident. The Scottish parliament stands at a turning point to outlaw its threat or use, and in doing so will lead the world into a safer 21st century," said Mayer.

Salmond's letter, sent last week, is addressed to the UK ambassadors of 122 countries party to the NPT. "In May, for the first time since the nuclear age began in 1945, the people of Scotland elected a government that is opposed to nuclear weapons," he declared.

The Scottish government was planning to do "all that we can" to persuade UK ministers to change their mind on Trident, said Salmond. "The majority of Scottish people and their elected representatives oppose these deployments."

A decision to replace Trident was taken by former prime minister, Tony Blair, and pushed through the Commons in March, despite a Labour revolt. But a majority of Scottish MPs opposed the decision, as have an overwhelming majority of MSPs.

Tomorrow's summit will be opened by the deputy first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and closed by the Scottish minister for parliamentary business, Bruce Crawford. "There are few more important issues in the world today than nuclear weapons proliferation," Crawford told the Sunday Herald.

"As a country we have every right to give voice to our opposition to nuclear weapons on Scottish soil."

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Scotland's stance was welcomed by disarmament experts. "This bold and timely initiative deserves to succeed," said Dr Ian Davis, director of the British American Security Information Council in London. He argued that there was a growing global movement to reverse reliance on nuclear weapons, backed by former US secretaries of state, George Schulz and Henry Kissinger, as well as Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

He said: "The Scottish people have long held the moral high ground on nuclear disarmament and having them represented at the NPT would be a real fillip to the majority world - currently 184 states - committed to a non-nuclear weapon future."

Dan Plesch, director of the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at the University of London, said Britain was violating the NPT by acquiring nuclear weapons from the US and by failing to conclude a treaty banning them, "so this Scottish initiative is bound to be welcomed internationally".

Green MSP Patrick Harvie, who will speak at the summit, said: "We all have an obligation to do what we can to stop the Westminster government forcing another generation of nuclear weapons onto Scotland."

New research released by the Scottish government suggests that opposition to nuclear weapons was a significant factor in causing voters to switch from Labour to the SNP at the May election.

There was "a compelling case Trident was at least part of the reason for Labour losing support in 2007", said the author of the research, Robert Johns from the University of Strathclyde.

A YouGov poll in May showed 58% of people in Scotland opposed Trident, up four to six points on previous surveys.

Below is the full text of the letter from First Minister Alex Salmond sent to 122 parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on 15 October 2007:

"I am writing to you, as representative of a State Party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to inform you of the Scottish Government's views and determination to play as constructive a part as possible in pursuing our country's nuclear disarmament obligations under the NPT. We also intend to explore the possibility of taking up observer status at future NPT meetings, so that we can more directly and effectively represent the aspirations and interests of Scotland's people. In the event that we do seek that status, I would hope we would be able to count on your government's support. "As you may know, the United Kingdom currently deploys a 4-submarine Trident nuclear weapon system from the Faslane Naval Base in Scotland. The UK also stores up to 200 nuclear warheads a few miles further along the coast, in Coulport. Last March the UK government pushed through the Westminster Parliament a preliminary decision to renew the Trident system, thereby signalling its intention to continue to make and deploy nuclear weapons beyond 2050. The majority of Scottish people and their elected representatives oppose these deployments.

"In May, for the first time since the nuclear age began in 1945, the people of Scotland elected a government that is opposed to nuclear weapons. On 14 June, the Scottish Parliament debated the following motion in relation to the UK Government's policy on nuclear weapons:
"That the Parliament congratulates the majority of Scottish MPs for voting on 14 March 2007 to reject the replacement of Trident, recognises that decisions on matters of defence are matters within the responsibility of the UK Government and Parliament and calls on the UK Government not to go ahead at this time with the proposal in the White Paper, The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent."

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"The Scottish Parliament showed clear and overwhelming opposition to the UK Government's plan to replace its Trident nuclear weapons system (by 71 votes to 16, with 39 abstentions), and widespread support for this Government's vision of a Scotland without nuclear weapons.

"During the debate, the Scottish Government signalled its intention to reflect on the views of the majority of Scots and carefully consider which aspects of the UK Government's plans to replace Trident impact on our responsibilities in Scotland under devolution. We made it clear that we will do all that we can, in light of those responsibilities, to persuade the UK Government to change its stance both on the replacement programme and on the general principle of maintaining and deploying nuclear weapons.

"Recognising that there are a range of views on the constitutional future of Scotland, we have embarked on a National Conversation with the Scottish public on the options for constitutional change leading to further development of the way we govern ourselves. As part of this debate on Scotland's constitutional future, we will be holding a high level meeting of key stakeholders from across Scottish life to discuss the implications of the replacement of Trident and what a Scotland without nuclear weapons might look like.

"I would like to assure you of Scotland's deep commitment to international peace and security, and our desire to participate in making the case for implementation of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation provisions of the NPT and other relevant international agreements and treaties. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you or your government wish to discuss these issues further."

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