

Lobbying Bob Rae on Nuclear Weapons Abolition

A delegation from the Hiroshima Day Coalition, including VANA members Phyllis Creighton and Anton Wagner, met with Bob Rae, Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic, in his Toronto Centre Riding office on February 22. The other members of the delegation were the Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow and Barbara Birkett, a former President of Physicians for Global Survival.

Phyllis thanked Bob Rae for being the lead speaker at the August 6, 2010 commemoration at the Toronto City Hall Peace Garden where he spoke passionately about the danger of nuclear weapons. She presented him with the text of her posting on the Science for Peace website <http://www.scienceforpeace.ca/65-years-it-s-time-to-retire-the-bomb> in which Phyllis quoted from his speech. Rae said, “This game of nuclear proliferation is a game that humanity cannot win ... that itself creates an insecurity which is ever growing and ever increasing. And that is why there is a compelling and overwhelming logic to the need for a treaty in which the world comes together and agrees we are going to first reduce these weapons, then we are going to eliminate these weapons, and we are going to create the institutions which will give everyone the confidence that the weapons are gone: they are no longer being tested, they are no longer being developed; they are no longer been seen as potential for use. That is a need, a necessity, a requirement for a sensible world politics going forward over the next 20 years. This is a cause to which we must all become attached.”

Setsuko Thurlow mentioned her role as a Hiroshima survivor in communicating the need to abolish nuclear weapons, her peace activism in Canada and Japan and pointed out to Mr. Rae Canada's historic image in Japan as a peacemaker. She referred to Lloyd Axworthy's lectures in Hiroshima and other cities in which he spoke about the need for NGO's to work together with governments on nuclear weapons abolition.

Barbara Birkett mentioned her longtime affiliation with Physicians for Global Survival and presented Mr. Rae with a dossier on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons available from the ICAN website <http://www.icanw.org/publications>

Anton Wagner referred to the fact that the Liberal Party had no official policy on nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons abolition and urged Mr. Rae that his Party adopt one. He stated his belief that a majority of Canadians wanted the Canadian government to be an active peacemaker on the international scene and referred to the June 25, 2010 Canadian Council of Churches "A World Without Nuclear Weapons" appeal to Stephen Harper endorsed by leaders of 23 faiths.

Mr. Rae said he thought Nuclear Weapon Free Zones were a good idea and that he had been present when Liberal Yukon MP Larry Bagnell introduced his Private Member Bill C-629 - An Act Respecting the Establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Canadian Arctic. Mr. Rae did not appear to think that nuclear weapons abolition would be a major election issue. He did emphasize, however, that civil society should keep up the pressure to call for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. He credited NGOs for getting work started and keeping the issue alive.

Barbara Birkett suggests we pick up a few of the themes of the Liberal "Canada in the World" document and apply them to nuclear disarmament, such as "The Global Networks," especially with India and China. Would a Liberal government undertake with these two nuclear powers to push urgently all nuclear weapons states especially, and all other states as well, toward a nuclear weapons convention? Since Liberal Party policy is going to promote peace, order and good government, will it not make nuclear disarmament a top priority since nuclear weapons are our most urgent security risk? Since the Liberal Party wants to re-balance the 3Ds of Defence, Diplomacy, and Development, does it think that urgent diplomatic efforts to achieve a nuclear weapons convention as agreed in the House of Commons on December 7 should be a priority of a Liberal government? Does it support an Arctic NWFZ? Does it realize the 96 billion dollars spent on maintaining nuclear weapons annually could be put to better use? Does it realize that a limited nuclear war between India and Pakistan could cause the deaths of up to a billion people through immediate trauma and subsequent climate change reductions of wheat and other production in the northern growing areas, setting development back immeasurably? Can the Liberal Party build an election campaign that focuses on families and pretend that nuclear weapons don't exist?