

74% of Canadians support joining the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace Advocating for the Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons since 1960

Toronto, Canada - Christopher Nolan's stunning new blockbuster film—*Oppenheimer*—opened in theatres across Canada. It tells of a past that still has us solidly in its grip—with the [nuclear doomsday clock](#) set at 90 seconds, as close to midnight as it has ever been since its creation in 1947. *Oppenheimer* invites us to imagine a future—if we're paying attention—of annihilation. The atomic scientists who reset the clock in January cite escalating threats of nuclear war, climate catastrophes already upon us, exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the ramping up of military expenditures and oil and gas production.

Sixty-three years ago, with Canada under pressure to take US nuclear missiles, the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) was formed, quickly spreading out in numbers and chapters across the country as women abandoned the kitchen for the streets to speak out against nuclear arms proliferation and preparations for war. Though we are less likely to be wearing the straw hats of our mothers and grandmothers these days, VOW remains on the front lines of protest against militarisation and the diversion of billions of tax dollars into war-making while other critical social priorities are set aside or abandoned.

While our country for years rested on its laurels as a peacekeeping nation, this legacy is now seriously in question. Canada has turned into a Warrior Nation, following the constant demands of NATO expansion, a greater share of our national wealth and the allure of American projects of strategic defence initiative, nuclear-arsenal modernisation, NORAD escalation at a time of climate emergency. We are told that a decades-long arms race has brought us the comfort of deterrence—a madness now reaching an annual cost of nuclear weapon modernisation alone of \$110 billion across nine nuclear-armed countries. When do we get to ask: What good things could we buy with that kind of money when real security is about food, housing, clean water, education, health care, a guaranteed annual income, and infrastructure that works?

Just when our country needs to be participating in initiatives of negotiation and de-escalation of the war in Ukraine, along with the West, we are escalating, adding fuel to the fire, cleaning out our Department of National Defence (DND) cupboards. While it is gratifying that our Prime Minister strongly condemned the delivery and use of cluster-bombs to Ukraine, he is also repeating his assurances to Ukraine that '*we will do all that it takes as long as it takes*'. As one observer in Vilnius said, 'What does that mean? What is "it"? and how long is long?'

Consider these facts and figures:

- Last year, NATO members spent a total of \$1.1 trillion on their respective military operations, accounting for 60% of global military spending.
- Since 2014, Canadian military spending has increased by 70%.
- In 2021, Canada spent \$33 billion on the military, which is 15 times more than on environment and climate change.
- In 2022, Former Defence Minister Anita Anand announced military spending will increase by another 70% over the next 5 years.
- NATO's demand that members buy new inter-operable weapons is leading to a costly arms race.
- Carbon-intensive weapons systems like fighter jets, tanks, and warships are exacerbating the climate crisis.
- In Canada, this includes the recently announced purchase of 16 F-35 fighter jets, part of the planned 88 F-35 fighter jets deal which will cost taxpayers at least \$77 billion over the lifecycle of the jets. The government of Canada is also planning to purchase warships at a sticker price of \$84 billion and \$5 billion for armed drones. The deadly, expensive and environmentally-harmful F-35 fighter jets purchased by Canada are designed for offensive first-strike use and to carry B61-12 tactical nuclear weapons.
- These expenditures *towards the machinery of war* represent a massive diversion *away from the critically urgent issues of healthcare, education, housing, jobs and climate solutions*

NATO's reliance on a dangerous nuclear deterrence and first strike policy puts us all at risk. We need to ask our Prime Minister and our leaders why Canada has refused to sign the [United Nations Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#) which came into force January 22, 2021. It appears there are no plans to work toward nuclear-de-escalation and disarmament. None. Why? We are not immune from the effects of nuclear war.

Since Canada first declared itself determined to implement a 'feminist foreign policy', we have seen little-to-no evidence to support the call. Putting women at the helm of key government posts does not make for a feminist foreign policy. Like the women who marched 63 years ago, we are still here, raising a strong voice against war and building a culture of peace. None of us wants to have to make emergency provisions (as our government is doing) in the event of nuclear war.

This film comes at a hinge moment for human kind. *Oppenheimer* is a story of science and great talent devoted to projects of death. And for the man himself a life lived out in a too-late repentance of the damage done and fears of annihilation. Let's write a different ending.

This weekend, August 6th, as Hiroshima & Nagasaki memorial events are being planned across the world, in honour of the horrible legacy these weapons have waged against people and planet, let's raise these questions in the media and start a meaningful dialogue in support of peace and the elimination of these weapons of mass destruction once and for all.

Contact information:

The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace

Lyn Adamson (Co-Chair)

tel: 416-731-6605

email: lyn.adamson9@gmail.com

www.vowpeace.org



CANADIAN VOICE OF WOMEN FOR PEACE

Historical Background
The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace
Canada Decides its Nuclear Future While Women Speak Out Against Weapons

In the early 1960s, as the world seemed to teeter on the brink of nuclear war, Halifax mother Peggy Hope-Simpson expressed the fear and anxiety that enveloped a generation of Canadians. *"I was having nightmares of being in the water with my children and I knew that I couldn't hold on to all of them, and I always would wake up in a sweat, just in terror."*

Hope-Simpson and other Canadian women would be voices of restraint as the country moved closer to arming itself with nuclear weapons and joining the ranks of Cold War nuclear powers.

In the fall of 1958, at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker agreed to accept 56 Bomarc missiles from the United States and deploy them in North Bay, Ontario and La Macaza, Quebec. Canada soon discovered the type of Bomarc missiles they accepted were designed to hold nuclear warheads. At the time Canada was a non-nuclear country.

The Canadian public was deeply sceptical about the wisdom of Canada becoming a nuclear power. In May 1960, Toronto Star columnist Lotta Dempsey, urged women to join together in opposition. *"I have never met a woman anywhere who did not hate fighting and killing, and the loss of husbands and the terrible tragedy of children dead, maimed or left homeless and hungry. Here lies our strength."* Her idea caught fire. Mavis Wiley was one of hundreds of Canadian women who wrote Dempsey letters of support. *"If you are going to scream loud and hard about the world situation right now, let me join you. But let us not scream alone, let us urge the women of the world to join us."*

A month later in Toronto, an anti-nuclear organization called the Voice of Women was born. Jo Davis was a member. *"Many of our members, for example, are young mothers who have never joined anything before, and who are now becoming vitally interested in world affairs through Voice of Women."* Chapters emerged everywhere. Peggy Hope-Simpson helped launch the Voice of Women in Nova Scotia. *"We were just ready to go. Someone said it was like mushrooms springing up across the country overnight, everywhere women just saying "ok" here's the agenda, let's get to it."*

Thérèse Casgrain, the long-time feminist crusader, carried the banner in Quebec. *"If Canada acquires nuclear weapons, we will become nothing more than an American satellite... We feel that Canadian public opinion must rise up against this."*

Maryon Pearson, wife of the Leader of the Opposition, became an honorary member. Her husband, Lester B. Pearson, was leading the fight in Parliament against nuclear weapons in Canada. The Voice of Women was joined by other voices around the country; individuals and peace groups, who urged Diefenbaker to refuse the warheads.

By 1962, Diefenbaker was still wavering on the issue of Canada's nuclear future. At the same time Diefenbaker faced tremendous pressure from American President John F. Kennedy to accept nuclear warheads. In October 1962, Cold War tensions peaked when the Soviet Union secretly introduced offensive missiles into Cuba aimed directly at North Americans. Kennedy brought the world to the brink of war when he demanded the missiles be removed in what became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. Six days later the Soviets retreated from their plan and the world breathed a sigh of relief. And Canadian peace activists stepped up their work.

Thérèse Casgrain was the new national president of Voice of Women. *"We have been a hair's breadth from war. Facing the ultimate crisis forces us to re-evaluate what is important in life, what do I stand for?"* Diefenbaker finally announced his decision; Canada would keep the Bomarc missiles but without their nuclear warheads. Diefenbaker was ridiculed for his decision. Some Canadians said it was like the country had a gun with no bullets. Diefenbaker was also accused of renegeing on commitments to Canada's allies

Sensing a shift in the political climate, **Pearson did a startling about-face:** The Leader of the Opposition now demanded that the government respect its commitments. *"It can only do this by accepting nuclear warheads."* Peggy Hope-Simpson couldn't believe it. *"Oh, we had invested a lot of trust in Pearson ... I was very dismayed, then I became angry and upset that he would do this. And then came this feeling of betrayal... that was a terribly bitter feeling."*

Buffeted on all sides, the Diefenbaker government fell in 1963. An election campaign was fought on the issue of nuclear arms. After a turbulent campaign, Pearson won but only with a minority. In the spring of 1963, Pearson met John Kennedy in Hyannisport and there he agreed to allow nuclear weapons on Canadian soil.

The first nuclear weapons arrived in Canada on New Year's Eve 1963. Canada's dance with the Bomarc missiles lasted until 1971. By then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had phased the missiles out of service.

Renamed the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, the organization continues to work on issues locally, nationally and internationally related to peace, social justice, human rights and development.