**CND speaking notes**

**Opening plenary -**Living in dangerous times: what prospects for disarmament?

It’s a pleasure to be here today and I want to start by paying tribute to CND for its role in the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Indeed, many of you here will have played your part in ICAN winning this year’s Nobel Peace Prize. An award which is also in recognition of the millions of activists worldwide who, like yourselves and all CND’s members, refuse to give up on the prospect of a nuclear free world, and spend a considerable part of your lives working to that end.

We live in dangerous times.

Nine countries together possess around 15,000 nuclear weapons. A single nuclear warhead, if detonated on a large city, could kill millions of people, with the effects persisting for decades.

And we have the most powerful person in the world threatening nuclear war via Twitter.

The President of a country that spends more on its 7000 warheads strong nuclear arsenal than all other countries combined. It’s also the only country to have ever used nuclear weapons in a war.

President Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric and engagement in military exercises in and around North East Asia could lead to the use of nuclear weapons, either by intention or miscalculation.

And whilst we cannot let North Korea off the hook, perhaps it’s understandable that it wants to play catch up. Especially when developing its own nuclear capacity might feel integral to protecting its own security and its very existence.

The UK has refused to rule out the pre-emptive use of force in the region.

It has refused even when such a reckless move could indicate to countries like China, India and Pakistan which currently have a No First Use policy, as well as North Korea, that such action is morally and practically acceptable.

Our leaders are acting dangerously and disarmament is the only way to keep everyone safe.

The stakes have always been high.

But the US is more willing to gamble than it’s been for decades. And their response to the provocations from North Korea is taking us closer to the brink of nuclear conflict than we have been for decades.

President Trump is more than just belligerent and bellicose though. He also symbolises the wave of intolerance, nationalism and racism that’s washing over our world.

A wave which spilled onto the streets of Britain, under cover of the EU referendum.

Onto the streets of Germany, where the far right won a higher share of the vote in recent elections than expected, surging into 3rd place with a campaign that opposed offering sanctuary to refugees.

Onto the streets of Nigeria where ethno-nationalism is resurgent once again and risks pitching families and friends against one another once again.

When Trump picks a fight with Kim Jong-Un, gives succour to the neo-Nazis rallying in Charlottesville, or promises to build a wall on the Mexican border he is validating bullying, hatred and division.

He is the very opposite of the leaders we need – leaders who champion peace on our behalf and strive for unity, stability and security.

Our own Prime Minister is little better. She peddles hypocrisy every time she demands other countries abandon nuclear weapons at the same time as growing Britain’s own nuclear arsenals. She rubs shoulders with dictators and deals arms with human rights abusers.

Her actions don’t make us safer. They make the world a more dangerous place.

From climate breakdown to the resource wars which are just one of the many consequences of environmental degradation. From increasing militarisation to the 65 million people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and are fleeing, amongst other things, conflict or political persecution, we live in dangerous times.

But even in the bleakest of times hope persists – as what Rebecca Solnit calls an axe you break down doors with in an emergency.

The hope that comes from an overarching vision of the kind of world we want to see, a holistic vision which recognises that the world’s problems can only be resolved when questions of equality, justice, sustainability and peace are understood as inextricably linked.

Of course we still need to address specific problems, symptoms and solutions - here and now. From nuclear disarmament to challenging austerity, to setting ambitious sustainable energy targets.

Which is why CND is campaigning against the white elephant that is Hinkley C Nuclear Power station matters so much.

Why making the case for spending money on the NHS not nuclear warheads – and how many nurses can be paid or hospitals built if we scrapped Trident – matters so much.

And why taking peaceful direct action, putting our bodies in the way of catastrophic harm, from Faslane to Devonport matters so much.

But we must remember to look upwards and outwards too. And to reach out both for the future we hope for and to the allies that will help us get there.

As a peace movement we have a strong tradition of building common cause to defend shared values and to build alternatives. Both here at home and internationally.

Our international links and solidarity are crucial to the success of our work for disarmament, so I am particularly delighted to welcome our international guests here today.

The challenges that we face are global and we will rise to them by working together, collectively across borders– as so clearly shown by the achievement of the UN nuclear ban treaty, and of course the Nobel peace prize.

I said earlier that it feels as if the world is close to the brink of a nuclear strike. Yet I hope we are on the brink of something else too.

It feels as if we might be.

The brink of a future in which nuclear weapons are forever banished from the face of our earth.

The prospects for disarmament are there. So let’s build on the opportunities that presents to secure a genuinely safe and secure future for all.

Let’s take our alternative, our vision, forward together, internationally.