

**Statements on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament  
by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Its Predecessors  
A Brief Summary  
Presbyterian Peacemaking Program  
[pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/actnow.htm#disarm](http://pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/actnow.htm#disarm)  
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“Peace is more than the absence of war, more than a precarious balance of powers.  
Peace is the intended order of the world with life abundant for all God’s children.”

*Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling*  
192nd General Assembly (1980)

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America)

The understanding of peace as God’s intended life abundant has guided Presbyterian General Assemblies as they have confronted issues related to nuclear weapons. Since 1946, when the General Assembly of the PCUSA supported measures “. . . looking toward drastic cuts in national armaments through international agreement,” assemblies, acting out of faith in Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace, have understood that working for God’s intended order and life abundant involves seeking international disarmament and arms control measures (PCUSA, 1946, p. 197). In this effort, the General Assembly has opposed specific weapons programs and various measures that they believed stood in the way of disarmament and peace. Over the years the General Assembly has opposed antiballistic missile systems, multiple warhead missiles, the B-1 bomber, and the M-X missile. At the same time, the General Assembly has advocated positive steps to control, reduce, and eliminate nuclear weapons. Consistently the General Assembly has supported the disarmament efforts of the United Nations. Beginning in 1967 the General Assembly endorsed a nonproliferation treaty and a comprehensive test ban. The General Assembly has called for an end to nuclear testing and urged nations to fulfill their obligations under international arms control treaties. In 1988 the General Assembly adopted a major policy statement entitled *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age*. The statement was the culmination of more than five years of inquiry into the basic question of the morality of war, with the added dilemma of whether the nature of war—given nuclear weapons—had been qualitatively changed in such a way as to necessarily reshape the Christian ethics of “The Just War Doctrine.” Always the General Assembly has understood that while eliminating nuclear weapons will not achieve the wholeness, well being, and justice of God’s shalom, so doing is a crucial, necessary step in bringing God’s shalom into being.

This summary, drawn from the *Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation* maintained by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, provides an overview of General Assembly statements on issues related to nuclear arms production, testing, and elimination. References are provided before each citation. For a more detailed overview, visit [pcusa.org/acswp](http://pcusa.org/acswp) and click on the *Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation* icon.

**1954 Statement – PCUSA, 1954, p. 185**

We urge our government . . . to refrain from unilateral decision which would be based upon any policy of “massive retaliation” through the use of instruments of mass extermination.

We call upon our government to be alert to every opportunity to promote world disarmament and to indicate its willingness to confer and to cooperate in any measure by which the world's burden of armaments may be relieved.

**1955 Statement – PCUSA, p. 219**

. . . We deplore hints as to the limited use of even small nuclear weapons, believing that such talk aggravates international tensions and may lead to actions which cannot be contained. . . . We therefore urge extreme caution in statements issued by the Government or the military regarding the use of nuclear weapons, even in the face of the duplicity and inconstancy of antagonistic governments which make pretension without confirmatory deeds.

**1955 Statement – PCUSA, 1955, p. 219**

. . . We believe that lasting peace requires the elimination and prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction. We agree that negotiations for the elimination of such weapons should be predicated on an adequate arrangement for international inspection and control.

**1964 Statement – UPCUSA, 1964, p. 318**

The 176th General Assembly: Condemns the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons by all nations as destructive to the life and health of this and future generations.

**1967 Statement – UPCUSA, 1967, p. 322; reaffirmed 1970**

[The General Assembly] 4. Urges governments to pursue, both inside and outside the United Nations, as an immediate goal: (a) an end to the arms race, which not only endangers the lives of all mankind, but through financial burdens involved, threatens disastrously those programs of social and economic reform so desperately needed both in our own country and throughout the entire world; (b) gradual balanced reduction in nuclear arms, related at every stage to appropriate inspection and enforcement procedures, until general and drastic nuclear disarmament is achieved; and (c) the studied development of other forms of international cooperation, the growth of international law, and the enlargement of community among more and more nations.

**1969 Statement – PCUS, 1969, p. 101; reaffirmed 1982**

1. Expresses appreciation of our government's ratification of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, urges strong citizen support of the treaty, and calls for the development of a more comprehensive nuclear ban.
2. Urges our government to consider carefully the extreme danger of the possible intensification of the arms race through expansion of the anti-ballistic missile systems.

**1971 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 640**

[The General Assembly:]. . . 2. Urges the United States Government to halt immediately the further production, testing, and deployment of MIRVs and to seek similar restraint by the U.S.S.R. with regard to such weapons.

4. Supports the United States ratification of the international treaty banning the placement of nuclear weapons on the seabed and urges the United States Government and all other governments to continue efforts to achieve agreements excluding all weapons from the seabed.
5. Endorses efforts to bring the Non-Proliferation Treaty into force throughout the world and establish a system of international safeguards to insure that fissionable material from peaceful programs is not diverted to weapons.
6. Urges renewed and realistic efforts to negotiate a comprehensive nuclear weapons test ban, and further urges that consideration also be given to the cessation of peaceful nuclear explosions as well; unless it can be shown to a responsible international group that their benefits clearly outweigh their potential ecological risks and that opportunities for further weapons testing under the guise of peaceful explosions can be foreclosed.

**1977 Statement – PCUS, p. 186**

[The General Assembly urged the President] to pursue with unrelenting vigor and courage a treaty for complete cessation of all explosive nuclear testing for armament purposes by all nations, [and called] on the United States Senate to ratify such a treaty when presented.

**1978 Statement – PCUS, 1978, p. 206; reaffirmed 1982**

[The 118th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States:]

- [5.] a. Reiterates its conviction that multilateral and comprehensive disarmament is the goal toward which the United States should strive;
- b. Supports a halt in further production of nuclear weapons multilaterally and a rollback of existing nuclear weapons;
- c. Urges the United States government to continue to work for major strategic arms reduction;
- d. Again urges the United States government to continue to work for a multilateral agreement to halt all nuclear tests; . . .

**1982 Statement – UPCUSA, p. 198**

The 194th General Assembly of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America:

Reaffirms the action of the 193rd General Assembly (1981) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America that endorsed the "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," specifically for a mutual freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missiles and new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons.

**1984 Statement – PC (USA), p. 345**

[28.296] Therefore, the 196th General Assembly (1984) reaffirms the commitment of its predecessors to seek a bilateral nuclear freeze; and seeks a multilateral nuclear freeze as immediate steps in the process toward reversing the arms race, reducing the risk of war, and eliminating the psychic, social, and economic burden that has been borne by all people of the world. In its conviction that the quest for control of militarism and the arms race must entail many initiatives, the 196th General Assembly (1984):

[28.297] 1. Calls upon governments of the United States, the Soviet Union, and all other governments of the world to:

- a. Renew their efforts at arms control, limitation, and reduction through negotiations, in all appropriate channels;
- b. Initiate anew the Comprehensive Test Ban negotiations, pledging a moratorium on all testing until the completion of such a treaty;
- c. Take new initiatives in achieving bans on chemical, biological, and biochemical weapons, concluding the chemical treaty process already under way and requesting the United States Government to continue the present moratorium on such weapons; and
- d. Initiate negotiations on preservation of space as a zone of peace, with prohibitions on the deployment of any mode of weaponry in space, pledging to forgo such developments while negotiations are in process.

[28.300] 5. Calls upon the United Nations to:

- a. Continue its endeavors, through the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, and its specific commitments to bring about arms control and disarmament;

**1992 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 917-918**

[The 204th General Assembly (1992)]:

4. Renews its call for an end to nuclear weapons testing, by all nations, by urging support of the congressional legislation mandating a moratorium on U.S. testing . . . and U.S. concurrence in an international treaty ending all nuclear weapons testing, either by amendment of the Partial Test Ban Treaty or by a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty;
5. Urges an international ban on the production and sale of fissionable materials for weapons purposes;
6. Urges tightening United States export controls on nuclear and ballistic technology

**1993 Statement – PC (USA), p. 766**

[The General Assembly calls upon the United States government to:]

- (4) Ratify the START II and Chemical Weapons Treaty;
  - (5) Dismantle its nuclear weapons as mandated by the START I and II process as quickly as possible; desist from building new nuclear weapons; help Russia and other CIS republics as needed to dismantle their nuclear weapons; develop mechanisms to prevent sale of nuclear weapons, components, or fuel to third countries or parties;
  - (6) Help build a viable international regime to stop of the proliferation of nuclear weapons before 1995;
  - (9) Maintain the nuclear testing moratorium after the current expiration date through 1996, and conclude negotiations on a comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to bring a permanent cessation of all nuclear weapons testing;
- b. [It calls] upon the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:
- (1) Continue to advocate for a Comprehensive Test Ban; urge other presbyteries to consider joining the eighty-eight presbyteries that have endorsed the CTB;

**1994 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 306-315**

1. Denuclearization of the Asia-Pacific region by:

- a. strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), renewing it in 1995, enhancing safeguard provisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and encouraging all Asia-Pacific countries, specifically India, Pakistan, North and South Korea, and Japan, to forego development of nuclear weapons, adhere to the NPT and abide by IAEA standards;

- b. mutual agreement of the nuclear powers in the region (the United States, China, France and Russia) to fulfill their obligations under the NPT to end nuclear weapons development, adhere to a moratorium on testing until testing can be terminated by a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and agree upon and carry out a systematic destruction of existing nuclear weapons in a program committed to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons;
- e. outlawing the use of nuclear weapons as a crime against humanity.

#### **1996 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 490-494**

The 208th General Assembly (1996) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

- a. Call[s] upon the countries who have nuclear weapons capability to honor their commitments by achieving a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and by taking steps toward the reduction and elimination of their nuclear weapons.
- b. Call[s] upon all nuclear weapons powers to voluntarily agree to a moratorium on testing until such time as a ban is achieved.
- c. Call[s] upon the United Nations to help achieve a negotiated treaty banning the production, sale, or transfer of fissionable material (uranium and plutonium) capable of use in nuclear weapons.
- e. Call[s] upon the adherents to the Inhumane Weapons Convention to reconvene and remove the obstacles to strengthening that treaty, particularly in regard to the banning of antipersonnel land mines.
- f. Commend[s] the United States government for ratifying the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (Start II) and encourages Russia to conclude its ratification process;

#### **1997 Statement – PC (USA), p. 562**

The 209th General Assembly (1997) [of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)]:

2. Call[s] upon all Middle Eastern countries to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and vigorously adhere to the provisions of these treaties.

#### **2000 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 280-281**

The 212th General Assembly (2000) [of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)] urges:

- support by the United States of the forthcoming UN conferences on arms control and disarmament issues, to assure that the existing treaty structures will be reaffirmed and strengthened, and that nothing will be done by the U.S. which will put at risk or undermine those efforts at assuring global security.

#### **2003 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 649-650**

##### **On Calling on All Nations to Fulfill Their Commitments Under the Nonproliferation Treaty**

The 215th General Assembly (2003) call[ed] on all nations to fulfill their commitments under the Nonproliferation Treaty and move together with the other nuclear powers, step by carefully inspected and verified step, to the abolition of nuclear weapons. As steps toward this goal, [it] call[ed] on the United States to do the following:

1. Renounce the first use of nuclear weapons.
2. Permanently end the development, testing, and production of nuclear warheads.
3. Seek agreement with Russia on the mutual and verified destruction of nuclear weapons withdrawn under treaties, and increase the resources available here and in the former Soviet Union to secure nuclear warheads and material and implement destruction.
4. Strengthen nonproliferation efforts by ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, finalizing a missile ban in North Korea, supporting UN inspections in Iraq, locating and reducing fissile material worldwide, and negotiating a ban on its production.
5. Steadily decrease the number of nuclear weapons available for immediate deployment in concert with other nuclear powers in order to de-escalate global nuclear tensions.
6. Initiate talks on further nuclear cuts, beginning with U.S. and Russian reductions to 1,000 warheads each.

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