

GOOD NEWS FROM LIBYA

The good news broke just before Christmas that Libya had agreed to accept nuclear inspectors. While Libya's reasons for this are probably based on economics and trade with the US, any dismantling of nuclear facilities is welcome. It gives us the opportunity to ask what our own government is doing about getting rid of its nuclear weapons.

BITS FROM ABROAD

Sweden has announced that it will fund a new international non-proliferation commission, led by the former chief UN weapons inspector, Hans Blix.

Australia has agreed to help the US develop its missile defence programme, by allowing the US to expand its spy base at Pine Gap. Cuts in social spending are expected, to help pay for it.

Japan has said that it is to develop its own missile defence system, to counter possible attack from North Korea.

Russia has deployed a new batch of inter-continental nuclear missiles.

Syria is attempting to introduce a UN Security Council resolution, calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. It urges all countries in the area to sign, and adhere to, all arms control and disarmament treaties.
Please write to Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon at House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA, asking him what the UK position is on Syria's proposal. Send a copy to your MP.

In an interview with an Israeli newspaper, International Atomic Energy Agency Director Mohamed ElBaradei urged Israel to give up its nuclear weapons. He said that such weapons were not an "incentive for security" and that Israel should sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The Pope, at a service to mark the Roman Catholic church's World Day of Peace on New Year's Day, called for a "new international order that draws on the experience and the results achieved ... by the United Nations". He has recently warned that "democratic governments know well that the use of force against terrorists cannot justify a renunciation of the principles of international law".

NEWS FROM THE US

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) held a ceremony in December to mark the dismantling of the last US nuclear artillery shell.

The Director of the NNSA wrote in November to the heads of the three major US nuclear research laboratories. The letter thanked them for their support in removing the restriction on research into low-yield nuclear weapons, "because of the chilling effect it has had on nuclear weapons reasearch and development".

All the major Democratic Presidential candidates oppose US research into a new generation of "usable" nuclear weapons.

QUOTATION OF THE DAY

"With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince people that we are here to help them".

Lt. Colonel Nathan Sassman, whose unit oversees the Iraqi village of Abu Hisma. (New York Times 7.12.03)

DECEMBER UN VOTES

Only the US opposed a resolution to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force. Only the US and India opposed a Japanese resolution on the total abolition of nuclear weapons. The UK joined the US, India, France, Israel and Pakistan in opposing a resolution for a nuclear-free world, but approved one affirming the nuclear states' obligations under Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to get rid of their nuclear arms.