



# OREPA News

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The flags of 66 nations that have joined the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons sent a powerful message to the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on August 6. For more on OREPA's events commemorating Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see page 7.

## A Tale of Two Treaties

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

First, the best: in June, the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons convened in Vienna, Austria. The meeting had been delayed six months by covid and scheduling hassles, but it finally happened.

The states that signed the TPNW, along with some observers, had three days together. For many, it was a long trip for such a short time. They made the most of it.

At the end of the three days, they released a Declaration and an Action Plan.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. The meeting opened with a speech by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres. He set the stage with an accurate and terrible acknowledgement: "The once unthinkable prospect of nuclear conflict is now back within the realm of possibility. More than 13,000 nuclear weapons are being held in arsenals across the

globe. In a world rife with geopolitical tensions and mistrust, this is a recipe for annihilation."

For some, that dire reality is a call to arms—literally. The United States is increasing the budget for nuclear weapons again this year, adding momentum to the new nuclear arms race with China and Russia, and doubling down on the policies and practices that have brought us to the precipice.

On the eve of the meeting in Vienna, a headline in the *Washington Post* read: Global nuclear arsenal expected to grow for the first time since the Cold War. (The article did not mention the TPNW...)

In Vienna, the dire reality was an inspiration to double down on the promise of the Ban Treaty, to work hard to put flesh on the Treaty's skeleton.

During the three day meeting, delegates focused on the humanitarian consequences of the nuclear threat. This is part of the discussion the nuclear armed states just can't bear to

hear. In Vienna, the voices of hibakusha, Pacific Islanders, Kazakhs, and others were given the microphone to describe what the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons called “the grim reality.”

By the end of the meeting, delegates had agreed to reach out to countries that have not yet joined the Treaty (66 have ratified the Treaty as this is written), and they said they wanted to work with civil society, non-governmental organizations, and academia to advance the goals of the Treaty.

The Declaration, “Our Commitment to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons” expressed alarm and dismay at threats to use nuclear weapons and condemned “all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances.”

The Declaration committed the parties to move forward with the implementation of the TPNW with the aim of “building a robust global preemptory norm” against the weapons.

“In the face of the catastrophic risks posed by nuclear weapons and in the interest of the very survival of humanity...we will not rest until the last state has joined the Treaty, the last warhead has been dismantled and destroyed, and nuclear weapons have been totally eliminated from the earth.”

It wasn’t all talk — they backed the Declaration up with an Action Plan that contains 50 specific actions for taking the Treaty forward, actions on universalization, victim assistance, environmental remediation, scientific and technical advice, inclusion, and more.

The Action Plan also outlined the process for nuclear armed states to join the Treaty, establishing a 10 year timeline for coming into full compliance with the Treaty by destroying all nuclear weapons and facilities. States that do not have nuclear weapons but host them (Germany, for instance) will have 90 days from the date they sign the Treaty to get the weapons off their soil.

The Action plan also promised to work between now and the next meeting of states parties, scheduled for November 2023, and outlined specific steps to meet the requirements for victim assistance and environmental restoration in places where nuclear weapons have been used or tested.

## 6 WEEKS FORWARD; FIFTY YEARS BACK!

Less than two months later, another nuclear weapons treaty was up for review—the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference was held during the month of August at the United Nations in New York City.

This meeting, too, began with an address by Antonio Guterres—his speech echoed the one

he had delivered in Vienna. That’s where the similarities ended.

The difference between the two conferences was night and day — the dark night of foreboding that looms over a world on the nuclear brink, and the bright hope of abolition.

The most significant difference, of course, is that one conference included the nuclear armed states, countries that came to the meeting determined to protect their nuclear stockpiles and to resist the demand of the rest of the world to disarm—as they promised to do in 1968.

Despite calls by non-nuclear nations for substantive commitments, the NPT Review ended up with no Declaration, no Action Plan, and no agreement on a final document. News media in this country blamed Russia for a last-minute veto of a final document. True enough.

But had Russia not vetoed the final document, the outcome of the NPT would have been no more meaningful than nothing at all. The draft of the document, according to ICAN, did “nothing to address the urgent problems it identifies, or to take action in proportion to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences it recognizes.” The document did not offer “anything concrete to reduce nuclear risks,” ICAN noted.

## A PATH FORWARD?

Robin Lloyd, a member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, attended part of the NPT Review Conference. She called the conference a fraud, noting that the “nuclear mafia have no serious plans to disarm.”

Lloyd succinctly summarized the NPT process; “For the NPT Treaty to collapse would be tragic, but for it to continue when everyone knows it is a lie is a moral and mortal affront to the people of the world.”

It is difficult to see a meaningful role for the NPT in the nuclear abolition campaign from here on out. After more than 50 years, it is clear the nuclear armed states that promised “in good faith” to negotiate a treaty on the end of the arms race and on complete disarmament “at an early date” have no intention of making good on that promise.

Any hope the NPT held has been extinguished by the stubborn insistence by a handful of countries on an untenable double standard.

The question that remains is clear and simple: In a world where nuclear weapons are “back in play” (some argue they never left the field) — will other nations now pursue their own nuclear capabilities, or will they choose to embrace the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and join together to press the nuclear armed states to join the community of nations that is committed to a nuclear weapons free future?

**“For the NPT Treaty to collapse would be tragic, but for it to continue when everyone knows it is a lie is a moral and mortal affront to the people of the world.”**

~ Robin Lloyd  
*Women's International  
League for Peace and  
Freedom*



*Who do you trust?*

# NNSA reveals UPF bomb plant cost and schedule overruns

Oops, they did it again!

In the early days of the Uranium Processing Facility bomb plant, the National Nuclear Security Administration showed up at a meeting in Knoxville and announced that they had a problem, one that would end up costing taxpayers more than half a billion dollars. It was the space/fit fiasco — the teams designing the new bomb plant had reached the 85% completion mark and noticed something. Their building wasn't big enough to hold all the equipment it would need to hold.

The old adage says it pays to be right. In the world of federal funding, it pays even more to be wrong. The government response to the space/fit screw up was to increase the budget for the bomb plant. There was no Congressional hearing, no investigation, no accounting whatsoever for the blunder.

Turns out that version of the UPF never got built. The project went from being a new facility to handle all enriched uranium operations at the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Plant to a smaller facility that would just build nuclear bomb components. And even then, they couldn't fit everything in—many dangerous highly enriched uranium nuclear weapons operations will continue in old, unsafe buildings for twenty to thirty more years, buildings that the NNSA admits do not meet environmental or seismic codes.

The plan for the UPF that *is* getting built was announced with a promise, one that was repeated many, many times in the years to come. It would be built by 2025,

and the cost would be capped at \$6.5 billion. Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander (now retired) chaired the Senate committee that funds NNSA, and he made the guarantee. Year after year, he repeated the promise. \$6.5 billion. 2025.

At the time, OREPA expressed skepticism, to put it mildly. Even with NNSA's down-sizing of the operation, even when they shifted parts of the bomb plant to other line items in a financial shell game, even when they kept promising—we looked at their track record (unblemished—cost and schedule overruns on every major project across the weapons complex) and ran our own numbers.

It won't happen, we said, putting our word against Lamar's.

Fast forward to June 2022, and a hearing in Congress on the FY 2023 budget. NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby is testifying. Tennessee Senator Bill Hagerty asks her about the UPF. Hruby's answer: Oops, we did it again!

Not in so few words. She announced to the Senate committee that the UPF bomb plant will not meet its schedule—it will be at least eight months late. And it will also bust the budget cap by an amount yet to be determined.

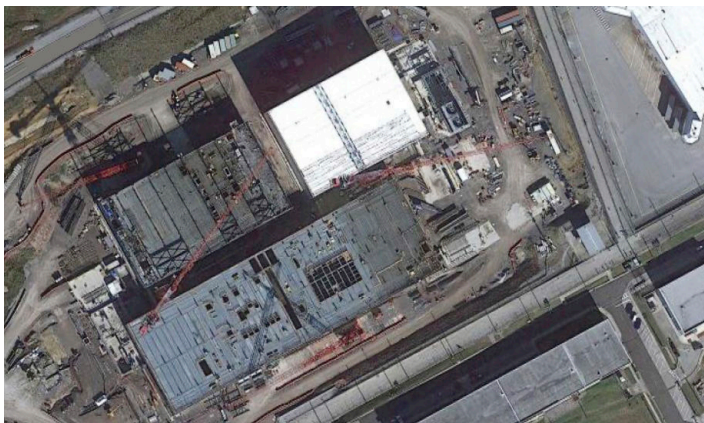
The NNSA's second major UPF bomb plant failure was met with the same kind of punishment as the first—Congress will increase the budget for the bomb plant next year.

Maybe it was this knowledge — that failure is rewarded with more money — that prompted Hruby's followup self-congratulating comment to the committee: "I just want to say that I think...an eight month delay and relatively minor cost increase is a commendable accomplishment."

Even more troubling than the predictable busting of the budget and the schedule for the UPF bomb plant is the fact the the NNSA continues to operate dangerous, failing facilities in Oak Ridge right now, putting the public and workers at risk on a daily basis. There is virtually no oversight, not from Congress, not from the media, and not from the public.

As if to underscore the fact, Administrator Hruby faced no pushback from the Senate committee when she praised her agency for its failure to keep its budget and schedule promises.

The Uranium Processing Facility Bomb Plant under construction and over budget—\$6.5 billion and counting—in 2022. Google maps.







From top: At Bissell Park in Oak Ridge with Gordon Maham and Kip Williams; August 6, 1998—walking to the blue line at Y-12; with Caroline Best and Bill Myers, taking our views to Washington, DC; folding peace cranes in Knoxville as part of the 1,000 cranes event.

## MARY DENNIS LENTSCH, PBVM

On Saturday, August 13, 2022, we gathered at the Great Smoky Mountains Peace Pagoda for an Obon Ceremony, a time to honor ancestors, share memories, and rekindle their spirits among us in the Japanese tradition.

This impulse is not foreign to the Christian tradition. At many funerals and memorial services, a verse from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews is invoked: “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...” it begins, envisioning a gathering of those who have gone before and yet remain with us, present in spirit.

Later that same day, August 13, Sister Mary Dennis Lentsch, PBVM, an amazing woman of faith whose life was compelled by that Christian tradition, joined that great cloud of witnesses. Her sister and niece were with her in Dubuque; her death came at the end of a slow decline that began with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer a little more than two years ago.

Mary Dennis left her family farm in Iowa as a young woman to join the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In her early years, she taught school. But several decades ago she left Iowa and came to Tennessee to serve in Appalachia. Assigned to assist a rural mountain community, she gathered women together to see what might be done. The women said they needed childcare services, but there was no place and no money. Mary Dennis

had no idea where to start, and she told them so. Then she said, “So, we’ll do it together!” Of necessity, her endeavor ended up not only providing the needed services, but it instilled in the women who had to figure out what to do and make it happen, confidence and a new sense of self-reliance.

I first met Mary Dennis on a trip to Nashville with the grassroots organizing group Save our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) – now Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment. She was with Anne Hablas, a Presentation sister from North Dakota. The two of them were quiet, reserved, and even seemed a bit timid as they anticipated their first trip to the state Capitol. Timid, I was soon to learn, was not a word to associate with



*“Excuse me, ma’am, but you are blocking the roadway. If you don’t move, we will place you under arrest...”*





Mary Dennis. She might be wary of a situation until she had made an assessment, but once she understood the lay of the land, she asked herself what her faith required, and from that moment on she was an unstoppable force.

When the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance announced the Stop the Bombs campaign in 1998, Mary Dennis was one of the first to step up. She had a history—or maybe we should say, “priors,” having been arrested at demonstrations against nuclear weapons at Honeywell and at the Nevada Test Site.

On August 6 of that year, she was arrested and charged with trespassing at the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, protesting the ongoing production of nuclear weapons there. It was not her last arrest. Over the next fifteen years, she would be arrested countless times on a variety of charges. When the government announced, in 2001, that trespassers would face federal charges, including prison, Mary Dennis was undaunted; she climbed over the racks assembled across the road and became a guest of the United States at the federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky.

The magistrate in that case sentenced Mary Dennis to two months in a halfway house, but before her scheduled report date, Attorney General John Ashcroft declared judges no longer could determine where sentences would be served. Several years later, as we stood outside the federal courthouse holding cardboard placards with empty boots stenciled on them, protest-

ing the war in Iraq, the magistrate judge, returning from lunch, walked past us on the sidewalk. He paused in front of Mary Dennis, spoke briefly, and went on. Later she said, “He just said, ‘You know it was never my intent to send you to prison.’” She assured him she knew that.

For a time, Mary Dennis lived in Chattanooga, working for the Office of Justice-Peace-Integrity of Creation for the Diocese of Knoxville, introducing congregations to opportunities to be more environmentally conscious, assisting in organizing Justice Day, and encouraging new people to take up the work of nuclear abolition.

The faith that sent her across boundaries in Oak Ridge also carried her across lines in Columbus, Georgia, at Ft. Benning, the military base notorious for training soldiers from Latin America who routinely return to commit war crimes and to prop up or lead corrupt governments. Mary Dennis spent six months in Lexington after her arrest at the School of the Americas.

Mary Dennis was a tireless worker against nuclear weapons; she volunteered at OREPA, lived in our Peace House in Oak Ridge for several years, maintained our database, served on the Action and Events committee, folded tens of thousands of peace cranes and attached red yarn to them—each year on August 6, hundreds of those cranes would be hung on the fence in front of the bomb plant in Oak Ridge, each one a plea for peace.

Mary Dennis left East Tennessee after hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans; she spent several years in ministry there with a small

From left: Outside the city court in Oak Ridge with her co-defendants; speaking against the UPF bomb plant at a Complex 2030 public hearing. Below: Picnicking with Ann Hablas on the other side of the fence; With Judy Ross and Anne at the Peacemaker Award celebration—Mary Dennis, Anne, Shelley Wascom and Lissa McLeod were honored that year; Marching in Oak Ridge in 2019 with her friends: Marese Nephew, Betty Coleman, Bill Nickle, and Mitzi Wood-Von Mizener.





group of nuns, serving food and providing other services. When she came back, she picked up where she left off with OREPA, and she took up residence at Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center, living a sparse life there in a tiny one room cabin that she shared with a four foot long snake, taking on numerous tasks for Narrow Ridge, and, every two months, assembling several hundred copies of OREPA's bi-monthly Reflections for Nonviolent Community, booklets filled with daily quotations, many of which Mary Dennis culled from her readings to share with the wider community.

In her last years in East Tennessee, she became a resident at the Riverside Catholic Worker house in Knoxville, assisting in the raising of foster children, later adopted, making and serving hundreds of sandwiches weekly in a neighborhood ministry, and serving on the Board of Directors and working for OREPA as a volunteer.

In early 2020, Mary Dennis went to visit her sisters Maureen and Rowena as part of a month-long trip that was to include a

retreat at the Presentation Motherhouse in Dubuque. She ended up sequestered with Maureen as covid-19 descended on the country. After several months, she was able to travel to the Motherhouse in Dubuque, quarantine there, and re-join her community. She continued to collect readings for the Reflection Booklet and sent them to us.

In the end, it seemed providential that Mary Dennis was home, with the Presentation Sisters, as her health declined. We missed her terribly in Tennessee, but we were pleased that she was being cared for so carefully by her community.

We could tell Mary Dennis stories for days on end without repeating ourselves, stories filled with joy and power and hope, stories that would make us laugh, stories that would make us angry, stories that would make us cry, and stories that would make us determined to carry on with the work, as she would have wanted. Those stories, and her memory, will inspire and animate us as we work for justice and peace for years to come.

~ Ralph Hutchison

## Honoring Mary Dennis

A number of people have inquired about making contributions to OREPA in memory of Mary Dennis. We feel sure she would approve.

Recalling Mary Dennis's remarkable affinity for young people and her enthusiastic support for our Next Generation effort, OREPA's Board is naming that fund the **Mary Dennis Lentsch Next Generation Fund**, and memorial gifts in her name will be directed to that fund.

The Mary Dennis Lentsch Next Generation Fund is already supporting the work of OREPA's organizer, Cody Dishner, and providing resources to support student organizing on the University of Tennessee campus.

Memorial gifts may be sent to OREPA at P O Box 5743, Oak Ridge, TN 37831 or may be made on-line through OREPA's web site: [www.orepa.org](http://www.orepa.org).



**Mary Dennis Lentsch  
Next Generation Fund**

**Juneteenth!** Knoxville's MLK parade was shifted from January (sleet and snow) to Juneteenth. OREPA's puppets turned out for the event despite the heat. Below, Jen Sauer begins the transformation to Gandhi; The OREPA puppets take to the street; We gathered in the park at the end. Two new puppets joined the troupe this year thanks to Kevin and Cindy Collins — civil rights icons John Lewis and Fannie Lou Hamer (second from right and far right in the park picture).



The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance is a grassroots nonprofit organization working to educate and organize people about nuclear weapons production in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We advocate an end to weapons production and we work to create and nurture nonviolent community in East Tennessee.

OREPA's newsletter is printed four times a year by Ullrich Printing in Knoxville, Tennessee and is on-line at [orepa.org](http://orepa.org).

Contributions to OREPA's work may be sent to P O Box 5743, Oak Ridge, TN 37831 or may be made securely on-line at OREPA's web site: [www.orepa.org](http://www.orepa.org). All gifts to OREPA are tax deductible.





# August in Oak Ridge: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Ban Treaty



In the early morning, we looked back, hearkening to the plea of *hi-bakusha* that nuclear weapons must never again be used. And then we turned our focus to the only way to be sure—the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

It was a crucial time to speak truth, and a busy time for OREPA.

Counter-clockwise, from top left: Pam Hindle reads during the Names and Remembrance Ceremony on August 6 at the gates of Y-12. Utsumi shonin ties a crane to the fence.



At Bissell Park, Cody Dishner explains the flags representing each nation that has joined the Treaty, and the Catalistia players dramatize the human cost of nuclear weapons with a skit about uranium mining (spoiler alert: Clementine does not fare well).

Then it was on to Y-12, marching through Oak Ridge. When we got there, we attached our chain of flags to the fence and displayed our banner declaring the power of the Ban Treaty.

That evening, at the Riverside Catholic Worker House in Knoxville, we made peace lanterns—with lots of great volunteer help.

On Tuesday, August 9, we gathered in Knoxville to remember Nagasaki with music, a litany of hope, some Japanese folk dancing—Kumi Alderman, demonstrating the moves for the *Bon Odori*, and then, after a shadow puppet performance, it was time for lighting the lanterns.

In the end, the lanterns carried our hopes, prayers, and dreams of peace into the night.





# JUDY ROSS

She was a small woman, quiet and unassuming. Her voice was gentle and lilting, wavering as she talked. She taught music and composed music, providing works for commissions that came from around the country. And, from time to time, she went to jail.

If you met Judy Ross, you might have had a hard time believing this dear, sweet, elderly woman, the archetype of a grandmother, would ever be sleeping on a concrete bench in the Anderson County Jail in Clinton, Tennessee. Not once, but many times.

It wasn't a case of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. It was a case of Judy v. the Bomb. When she learned that nuclear weapons were being manufactured at the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, her reaction was typical. Really?

The atypical part, though, was that she didn't stop there. Building nuclear weapons that threaten all life on Earth was not acceptable to Judy, and she would not be remembered as someone who saw the threat and walked away from it. Instead, she joined OREPA activists again and again in actions at the Bomb plant; she was arrested repeatedly for blocking the entrance to Y-12. That gave her a chance to educate the judge and everyone in the courtroom and eventually the women she met in the jail.

She also had a lively sense of humor. She emerged from jail one time and declared she had been well taken care of. "I had a room all to myself!" she marveled. "Judy!" we teased, "You were in solitary confinement!"

On another occasion several women were being held together in the transport cell—concrete floor, walls, and benches, and a light that stayed on 24 hours. When dinner came, Judy wrapped her small piece of chocolate cake in a napkin, and later the women played poker with cards fashioned from napkins. Judy's dessert was the prize to be claimed. When she won the card game she began to celebrate her good fortune, then asked, "Why am I celebrating? It was my cake to begin

with!" Then she divided it up among her fellow detainees.

The judge determined he would stop the civil disobedience actions by locking people up for longer and longer stints in jail. Judy simply accepted whatever sentence was handed down. Her convenience was not a consideration—the planet was at risk.

Most actions, Judy was accompanied by younger activists who were following her lead—she inspired not with stirring orations, but with action.

Sometimes getting arrested took time—waiting while others were processed before getting stuffed into a police cruiser for the trip to jail. Judy carried a plastic lawn chair on her left arm as she approached the barriers. When the waiting began, she had a ready seat.

On another occasion, the action involved setting up house in the middle of the road, complete with furniture. In the end, Judy and Ron Dale were left on a sofa in the middle of East Bear Creek Road, blocking the entrance to the bomb plant. Judy flashed peace signs to the crowd assembled at the side of the road. Bishop Tom Gumbleton visited them and offered his blessing in the middle of the road.

Judy's commitment to peace and justice never waned, even as her body started requiring her to slow down. She was delighted—and delightful—when she received a Peacemaker Award from OREPA several years ago. In June of this year, when family and friends gathered to celebrate her 100th birthday, she asked OREPA's coordinator to join the festivities and make a brief presentation.

Before we ever met Judy, she had lived a full life and reached a point when most people are retired and easing their way into the sunset. She was just getting her second wind, though, and set her sights on eliminating nuclear weapons.

Beneath her sweet, gentle, appearance was a steely determination to everything she could, until her last breath, to save the world from itself. And she did just that.

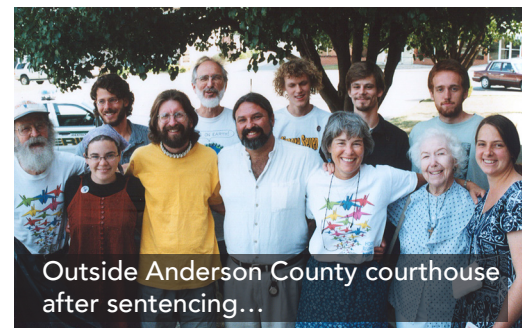


Scenes from a life well lived: The Retirement Years.

On the steps of the Anderson County Courthouse awaiting trial and sentencing.



Holding court with media from her throne...



Outside Anderson County courthouse after sentencing...



Six strong women receive OREPA Peacemaker Awards



With Ron Dale, awaiting arrest at Y-12.