

From [The Kings Bay Plowshares](#) | Original Article



The Kings Bay Plowshares 7 released the following statement on Monday: "On Friday, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the landmark Intermediate Range Nuclear Missile Treaty (INF). 'There is a real and present danger that this action will provoke a renewed nuclear arms race and brings us closer to nuclear war,' says Martha Hennessy, granddaughter of Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day and co-defendant of the Kings Bay Plowshares 7."

[The seven Catholic defendants are "charged with three federal felonies and one misdemeanor for their actions in going onto the Naval Base at Kings Bay Georgia and symbolically disarming the massive amount of nuclear weapons at that base." The group states that their actions are "to make real the prophet Isaiah's command to 'beat swords into plowshares.'" The seven are: Hennessy, Mark Colville, Clare Grady, Jesuit Fr. Stephen Kelly, Patrick O'Neill, Carmen Trotta and Elizabeth McAlister (the widow of Philip Berrigan). [See [KingsBayPlowshares7.org](#) as well as *Nati*

*onal Catholic Reporter*

[coverage](#)

and recent piece in

[The Brunswick News](#)

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The group's statement continued: "This is not the first failure by the U.S. to either endorse or abide by treaties which would reduce the threat posed by the mere possession of weapons of mass destruction. The crucial Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996, and has been ratified by 166 countries, but the U.S. is not among them. In 2001, President George W Bush formally withdrew from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) signed with the U.S.S.R. in 1972. We must worry that the U.S. will next quit the New START Treaty signed with Russia in 2010; such an action would erase a legally binding, verifiable agreement capping the number of strategic nuclear warheads possessed by the nuclear powers.

"Since 1980 Plowshares has been a movement of nonviolent symbolic direct actions disarming

nuclear weapons on at least 100 separate occasions.

"Most recently, on April 4, 2018, seven Plowshares activists entered the Kings Bay nuclear submarine base, in Georgia for a nonviolent symbolic disarmament action. The base is homeport to six U.S. nuclear ballistic missile submarines, each armed with 16 Trident II missiles.

"The Kings Bay Plowshares 7, all devout Catholics, now face up to 25 years in federal prison. Their trial in Southern Georgia federal court may begin in March or April. As in previous acts of civil resistance and conscience, the defendants seek to expose the illegality and immorality of Trident's omnicidal nuclear weapons.

"The INF Treaty is a highly imperfect shield against the growing nuclear arsenals festering in nine countries. What will help to ensure human survival is the moral conviction of people willing to undertake symbolic acts as one way to chart other roads leading to a disarmed world.

"With actions such as Kings Bay Plowshares 7 and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, also known as ICAN (the 2017 Nobel Prize winner), which is promoting the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, this nation could pull back from the brink of omnicide."

"Pulling out of the INF Treaty was an unconscionable and reckless act on the part of the Trump administration," said Kings Bay Plowshares defendant, Patrick O'Neill. "Such unilateral action involving weapons of mass destruction only serve to put our planet at greater risk for the use of nuclear weapons, which could end the human experiment."

BRUNSWICK, GA – The Kings Bay Plowshares evidentiary hearing regarding the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) has concluded after a second full day of testimony November 19. Five of the seven defendants testified at the federal court hearing. The activists are facing three felony charges and one misdemeanor charge with a possible 25-year sentence. They were arrested April 5 at Naval Station Kings Bay on the Florida border after their nonviolent symbolic disarmament action of Trident submarines and the D5 missiles they carry.

The seven Plowshares activists are asking the court to dismiss or reduce their charges because the government failed to offer the least-restrictive means of resolving the charges against them. Magistrate Judge Benjamin Cheesbro is expected to rule on the motion in several weeks after

additional written argument. If he recommends against it then a trial date will be set.

The hearing was the conclusion of two days of testimony regarding the RFRA. The defendants explained their “deeply held religious beliefs,” and how their practice of their religion has been burdened by the government’s response to their actions. The RFRA requires the government to take claims of sincere religious exercise seriously.

Defendants Fr. Steven Kelly, S.J. and Clare Grady gave their testimony Nov. 7 which were the embodied testimony given by Catholic expert witnesses and theologians, Fordham University Prof. Jeannine Hill Fletcher and Bishop Joseph Kopacz, of Jackson, MS. In addition to the remaining five co-defendants testifying Nov. 19, the prosecution called its second of two witnesses, a civilian communications official for the base.

After the testimonies, Judge Cheesbro denied motions from several co-defendants requesting a lessening of their bond restrictions, including removal of ankle monitors for the five defendants who are released on bond. They challenged the government’s contention that the five are a “danger to community safety.” Fr. Steve Kelly and Elizabeth McAlister remain incarcerated in the Glynn County Detention Center.

In their testimonies throughout the day several defendants said the real sin present at Naval Station Kings Bay are the Trident II D-5 nuclear missiles on the Ohio-class submarines for which the base serves as the home port and that Trident's omnicidal nuclear weapons are the greatest threat to all of God’s creation.

Elizabeth McAlister, the 79-year-old widow of Phil Berrigan, from Baltimore, recounted her testimony in the trial of the 1983 Griffiss Plowshares action, “The government has set up a religion of nuclearism. It is terrifying and dead, dead wrong. It is a form of idolatry in this culture, spoken about with a sense of awe. It’s a total contradiction to our faith. It puts trust in weapons, not trust in God. God is our strength,” McAlister said, quoting scripture: “Be still and know that I am God.”

Carmen Trotta, from the NY Catholic Worker, said that the government’s possession of nuclear weapons imposes a burden on all religious faith. He quoted the Catholic Church’s Vatican II documents: “The arms race is a treacherous trap for humanity. Nations should mature to take

care of one another. Nuclear weapons prevent us from having mutual cooperation with each other rather than mutual destruction.”

Patrick O’Neill, from Garner, NC Catholic Worker, said that the defendants and the prosecution truly shared a compelling interest to prevent nuclear war. “It is our universal burden,” he said. “We can’t separate our religion and our faith from our lives, they are the same thing. Our Catholic faith calls us to uphold the sanctity of life and to preserve creation.”

Martha Hennessy, granddaughter of Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, spoke of the formation of her faith. Hennessy said when she was young, she learned that nuclear weapons threaten all of God’s creation, and are directly opposed to her religious beliefs. “I’m a grandmother, as a few of us are here,” Hennessy said. “I don’t care just for my children, but all the children in the world.”

Mark Colville, of New Haven, CT Catholic Worker, testified his Catholic faith forms the foundation of his conscience. “It’s the rudder of the ship of my life,” he said. “The sins of omission interfere with my faith in God.”

Colville spoke of what the Plowshares were trying to do in community with an image former CIA officer, Ray McGovern, visualized about the cathedral near the World War II concentration camp at Buchenwald. “The incense of the ceremonial prayers within the church outside Buchenwald, rising upward to God as our prayers,” he said, “and over the wall just beyond the smoke from the chimneys of the death camps, the ashes of our brothers and sisters rising upward... and the two streams of smoke mixing above. Whose prayers are being answered by God?” Colville said, “Kings Bay Naval Base is labeled as a death camp for the entire world in the waiting. What I’m charged with just seems so very petty compared to nuclear annihilation,” Colville said. “Yes, we went in the night and cut through the fence. We’re called to go into the darkness, to bring into light, to expose what is hidden.”

The Plowshares movement began in the early 1980s and advocates active resistance to war usually involving symbolic protest including hammering on weapons and damaging military property following the exhortation of the prophet Isaiah, “To beat swords into plowshares.” There have been about 100 Plowshares protests worldwide.

“The victory of the day,” said Patrick O’Neill after the hearing, “was that truth was spoken by all defendants. It is clear that is the threat.”