

## From Kings Bay Plowshares 7

I am speaking to you from land that was taken from the Momauguins, members of the Quinnipiac Indian Tribe, here in what is now called the Hill Neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut. So to begin, I wish to acknowledge them, and bow to the spirits of a people who treated this territory with reverence, as the sacred space that it is.

What I have to say today is simple, and it echoes the message I have borne from the first time I walked into your courtroom three years ago. My neighborhood, my family, and I have a right to live without a nuclear gun on hair-trigger alert held perpetually to our heads. That right is ours, both by birth and by law. It is neither granted by courts, nor denied by them, but this court's refusal to defend that right - or even to recognize it - has now, with no fewer than 28 convictions against me and my companions, placed it firmly in a posture of criminality. On this, the world agrees, as the international consensus prohibiting the building and possession of nuclear weapons became law, by ratified treaty, on January 21st of this year. I bow then, also, to the vast multitude of neighborhoods worldwide - beginning with Hiroshima and Nagasaki - whose people have been demanding to be free of this scourge for more than 75 years, and who now await our nation's compliance.

This court was given a responsibility to all of those people, to all of those neighborhoods, and to me. It was a charge that the times demanded and still demand; an obligation that emanates directly from the conscience of the human community, and which the court ultimately refused to accept. That responsibility was simply to allow the law to be applied beyond the fence at Kings Bay; that fence behind which this government, in its lawlessness, has hidden first strike weapons with enough firepower to kill 6 billion people; a fence that I and my loved ones, with much fear and trembling, freely answered the call of faith, the call of conscience, and the call of generations yet unborn, to breach.

I am no lawyer, but I have come to know enough about the law, about politics, and about history, to say with confidence that there were two decisions already set in place before this court ever met me. The first was that the secrecy that remains both the lifeblood of this murderous enterprise called nuclearism, and the most lethal cancer for democracy - would not be disturbed. The second was that the legality of nuclear weapons was never to be questioned. These two decisions essentially preordained the prospect that we would be subjected to a political trial, with little possibility of a coherent defense, before a jury that would be laboring under an enforced ignorance. The choice of this court to abide by those decisions has rendered it complicit in the crimes for which it has granted impunity to this government.

No wonder then, that when our jury - chosen from the very neighborhoods surrounding King's Bay - asked this court if our testimony that nuclear weapons were being kept at the base was fact or speculation, the court refused to answer, asserting that the question was irrelevant. Indeed, maybe the greatest tragedy laid bare by these proceedings is that our federal courts have lost sight of one of the most basic concepts of justice, borne out time and time again in this nation's history: ultimately, in the formation and the deconstruction of law, it is the conscience of the human community that determines what is relevant, not the whims of a corporatized government or the dubious demands of a terrified national security state. If ever there was a moment in history when we needed to recover this understanding, that moment has come.

Sitting here under judgment today, what I grieve most about this trial has nothing to do with a verdict or a sentence. It is this court's absurd logic, which effectively maintains that the only proper time to subject these omniscidal weapons to any kind of legal scrutiny is after they've been launched.

In a very real sense, then, this hearing today is itself irrelevant. The court has already pronounced a sentence on me, on my family, and on my neighborhood. We are hereby condemned to live as members of a rogue state, which, in the face of a global consensus that outlaws nuclear weapons, has budgeted what amounts to \$100,000 per minute over the next ten years to upgrade its stockpile of these useless, poisonous idols. We are sentenced to bear quietly, obediently, the relentless human tragedy that this massive theft of resources wreaks on our community. We are ordered to disobey any faith or conscience-based command to substantively reject the false security that this standing threat to murder all of creation provides.

For my part, I declare to you today that we will not comply.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the large number of letters that you, Judge Wood, have received on my behalf. It is my sincere hope that you will consider them not as pleas for mercy, but expressions of the conscience of the community with regard to the words that Steven and I have spoken here today. And, in that same spirit, I would like to add this prayer from Pope Francis to the pile...

**A Prayer for Our Earth**

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

That we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live

as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this

earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts

of those who look only for gain

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage

us, we pray, in our struggle

for justice, love and peace.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*