

Good Friday at Livermore Lab: A call for a nuclear weapon-free future



Anti-nuclear weapons protests are an annual tradition at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. | AP p

By [MARILYN BECHTEL](#) for People's World

LIVERMORE, Calif.—On this Good Friday, as nuclear disarmament, peace, and justice advocates gathered in person and virtually at the gates of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory for their annual Interfaith Service of Worship and Witness, the theme—taken from Dr. Martin Luther King's 1967 book of the same name—was, Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?

Participants in the event that focused on one of the two national laboratories designing every warhead and bomb in the U.S. nuclear arsenal linked the struggles to abolish nuclear weapons

and achieve peace in Ukraine and around the world with observances of Easter, Ramadan, and Passover.

Marylia Kelley, executive director of [Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment](#), began her remarks with a special dedication on behalf of her organization and event organizers [Ecumenical Peace Institute](#)/Clergy & Laity Concerned and Livermore Conversion Project.

“We lift up the life and the incredible work of our friend, Daniel Ellsberg, as he struggles with a likely fatal cancer,” she said. “Dan’s contributions to peace, justice, government accountability, openness, and the abolition of nuclear weapons cannot be overstated. He has asked all of us to continue the struggle, and here, on this day, at the Livermore Lab gates, where Dan has risked arrest many times, we answer that call.”

While workers inside the fence line will tell her that nuclear deterrence keeps the peace, Kelley said, “In truth, it does the opposite.” Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine turns the myth of nuclear deterrence on its head, while the U.S. used nuclear weapons literally at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and has used them virtually in veiled and not-so-veiled nuclear threats over the decades.

“Today,” she said, “U.S. nuclear policy is at an inflection point. Rethinking our people’s safety and security is essential. Escalating the funding for multiple novel warheads carries financial, technical, health, and deep moral risks, while it intensifies nuclear dangers globally and adds fuel to the fire of a spiraling global arms race.”

With the U.S. and Russia having some 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons, and the United Nations [Treaty](#) on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons challenging nuclear weapons states and their allies to reexamine the role of the weapons in policy and practice, Kelley said, “bilateral and multilateral diplomacy must be soberly considered and creatively centered in U.S. actions.”

With the Biden administration’s military budget request for fiscal 2024 now [totaling](#) \$886 billion, “more than last year’s, which was obscenely more than the year before,” Kelley said we must consider Dr. King’s words: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.”

She said over 80% of more than \$2 billion specifically requested for Livermore Lab is earmarked for nuclear weapons, including one new warhead, the W80-4, intended for a Long Range Standoff Weapon to let pilots conduct sneak attacks with a precision-guided radar-evading nuclear weapon on targets thousands of miles away.

Another new warhead being developed at Livermore, the W87-1, is slated to sit atop a new intercontinental ballistic missile, the Sentinel. Kelley said the W87-1 is the “first warhead being designed with 100% new components since the announced end of the first Cold War,” and it is the main reason the U.S. will greatly expand pit production. Pits will be produced at Los Alamos National Lab and the Savannah River Site, with Livermore Lab in a supportive role.

“Overall, this ‘nuclear modernization’ program is slated to cost the U.S. upwards of \$2 trillion over 30 years,” Kelley said. “So, I go back to Dr. King. When you hear what we as a nation cannot afford, I invite you to think about \$2 trillion for nuclear weapons and their infrastructure, that the U.S. is buying into without much discussion. We’re here to discuss it, we’re here to turn it around.”

One effective action, she said, is to help build support for [H. Res. 77](#), introduced in January by U.S. Representative James McGovern, D-Mass., which calls on President Biden “to embrace the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and make nuclear disarmament the centerpiece of the national security policy of the United States.”

H. Res. 77 also calls on the president, members of the administration and legislative leaders “to lead a global effort to move the world back from the nuclear brink” by actively pursuing new disarmament agreements with Russia, China and other nuclear-armed states, renouncing the first-use option, ending the president’s sole authority to authorize a nuclear attack, taking U.S. nukes off hair-trigger alert and cancelling modernization programs.

The resolution currently has 12 co-sponsors, Kelley said, and encouraging one’s representative to join them – or say thank you if your representative is already onboard – is a concrete action to move the country back from the brink. Another is calling on Congress to defund Livermore Lab’s nuclear warhead activity. The websites of the Ecumenical Peace Institute and Tri-Valley CAREs feature more actions the public can take.

“Together,” Kelley said, “we can make this happen!”

Taking up the theme of Dr. King’s book, the Rev. Dr. Dorsey Blake, presiding minister at San Francisco’s [Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples](#), told the gathering, “I first raise the question, what is our ‘here,’ and where do we go from here? And I think we can certainly say that ‘here,’ from our political leadership, is chaotic.”

Calling the current risk of nuclear war over Ukraine “as great as the world has ever seen,” Blake said, “I condemn what Putin has done, I cannot support the invasion of Ukraine. And yet at the same time, I condemn the fact that we send weapon after weapon with no commitment to peace, to sitting down and talking. How do we work this out?”

Blake emphasized that the problems the world faces go far beyond Putin: “We have a lot to do with our own dedication to violence. We have a vile, overarching culture of violence in this country—it seems to be endemic to the systems, institutions, policies, and personalities that dominate our daily plans. We must rededicate ourselves, in our own ways, to stopping the madness before it destroys this beautiful, beautiful planet.”

He noted that in his book, Dr. King “called for the full emancipation and equality of Black people.” Together with Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, and many others, King proposed a Freedom Budget that—among its many provisions—would guarantee annual incomes and universal healthcare. “All of these things in 1967, and where are we now? Chaos!”

At the same time, Blake added, “We are an aspiring people—can you not see on the horizon a new day...a movement even beyond the confines of this nation, a movement subverting dominant power? We must commit ourselves so there can be no past greater than our future.”

Among the many who helped lead the Good Friday Worship and Witness were Farha Andrabi Navaid, Mountain View/Palo Alto Musalla; Isabella Zizi of the Northern Cheyenne, Arikara and Muskogee Creek Nations; musicians Betsy Rose, Benjamin Mertz and Francisco Herrera; and Mark Coplan, St. John’s Presbyterian Church, Berkeley.

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