

## Who we are

British Pugwash is the UK arm of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, an international network of scientists and experts, which seeks to inform government and the public on scientific matters and the threat posed by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.



Joseph Rotblat (right)  
with Bertrand Russell

Pugwash aims to bring scientific insight and reasoning to bear on threats to human wellbeing arising from science and technology, and above all from the threat posed to humanity by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. It is also concerned with questions relating to the social responsibility of scientists, and the quest for an end to war itself.

Pugwash was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995, shared with its co-founder and the organisation's most inspirational figure, Joseph Rotblat, in recognition of their "efforts to diminish the part played by nuclear arms in international affairs and, in the longer run, to eliminate such arms". It was the first time the prize was awarded jointly to an organisation and an individual.

As an organisation Pugwash has made a unique contribution to the peace movement. Since 1957, it has provided a respected forum for discussion where scientists and experts from different backgrounds and political systems take part as individuals and not as representatives of any government, primarily in "off the record" meetings. This ground-breaking approach provides channels to transmit information to the highest levels of government. Its influence has been enhanced by its reputation for impeccable scientific integrity and lack of bias.

Pugwash has national groups in several countries. British Pugwash has played and continues to play a major role in many of its activities.

# The History of Pugwash

The organisation was born during some of the most uncertain days of the nuclear age when, on 9 July 1955, Bertrand Russell issued the Russell-Einstein Manifesto. It was signed by Albert Einstein as the last public act of his life. The Manifesto, which called on world leaders to “learn to think in a new way”, was launched at a press conference in Caxton Hall in London, chaired by Joseph Rotblat, its youngest signatory, who worked closely with Russell at this time.



Participants in the first Pugwash Conference held in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, 1957

The statement received worldwide attention and led to the convening of the first Pugwash Conference in 1957, involving 22 participant scientists from East and West. The meeting was held at Cyrus Eaton's lodge in the fishing village of Pugwash, Nova Scotia – hence the organisation's name.

Topics included ensuring the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, averting the dangers of nuclear weapons, and promoting the social responsibility of scientists. These threads continue to be interwoven in Pugwash's work today.

At this first conference a British Advisory Committee for Pugwash was set up, which evolved in 1963 into the British Pugwash Group, initially under the chairmanship of Sir Neville Mott. Other notable scientists, including Cecil Powell, Rudolf Peierls, Dorothy Hodgkin and, more recently Robert Hinde, have guided British Pugwash over the years.

## Pugwash role in international WMD negotiations

British Pugwash worked with International Pugwash to bring together scientists and public figures from both sides of the Iron Curtain to discuss some of the most sensitive security issues during these difficult years. The Pugwash Conferences have been widely credited with laying the foundations for some of the most significant treaties of the period, among them the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions.

Rising concern over radioactive fall-out resulting from nuclear weapons testing during the fifties and early sixties led to discussions on a nuclear test ban treaty. At a 1962 Pugwash meeting, US and Russian scientists developed the “black box” idea – the use of sealed boxes containing instruments to monitor seismic activity remotely.

This meeting, and international discussions which followed it, influenced the signing of the **Partial Test Ban Treaty** in October 1963.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty negotiation benefited from the sustained involvement of Pugwashites. At the 12th Pugwash Conference in Udaipur, India in 1964 the eminent Russian physicist, Mikhail Millionshchikov argued that the Soviet Union should have defences against ballistic missiles. However he subsequently recorded that he had privately come around to the anti-ABM position during a Pugwash meeting in 1964. He finally stated his opposition to ABM systems in public during the 19th Pugwash Conference in Sochi, USSR in 1969. A month later, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks began in Helsinki. The outcomes were the **ABM Treaty** and the **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) 1** accords of 1972.

Drafts of the nuclear **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, submitted by the US and the USSR to the 18-Nation Disarmament Conference in Geneva, were reviewed by a working group at the 17th Pugwash Conference in 1967, and proposals to increase their acceptability were developed.

Pugwash has not only been concerned with nuclear weapons but with all weapons of mass destruction. In 1959 the series of Pugwash Chemical and Biological Warfare Workshops were instrumental in bringing together technical experts, official negotiators, and industrial and academic experts to help lay the framework for the 1993 **Chemical Weapons Convention**. This Convention owed a great deal to the activities of a British Pugwashite and former member of its Executive Committee, Julian Perry Robinson.

The 1972 **Biological Weapons Convention** resulted from close cooperation between Pugwash, the World Health Organisation and the chairman of the UN-appointed committee, Sir Solly Zuckerman.

A Pugwash study group on Conventional Forces helped to encourage the restructuring of force levels, setting the stage for the 1987 **Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty** and the 1990 **Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty**.



Bottom right:  
Russian physicist,  
Mikhail Millionshchikov  
at the 13th Pugwash  
Conference, Karlovy Vary,  
Czechoslovakia, 1964

*"The quest for a war-free world has a basic purpose: survival. But if in the process we learn how to achieve it by love rather than fear, by kindness rather than by compulsion; if in the process we learn to combine the essential with the enjoyable, the expedient with the benevolent, the practical with the beautiful, this will be an extra incentive to embark on this great task. Above all, remember your humanity."*

Last lines of Joseph Rotblat's Nobel Acceptance Speech, December 1995

## International diplomacy

Pugwash's role in "behind the scenes" negotiations helped to keep open channels of communication between hostile states. For example, in 1962, links between US and Russian Pugwash scientists during the Cuban missile crisis provided an unofficial channel of communication between governments.

Pugwash also played its part in bringing to an end the Vietnam War. In 1967, a Pugwash meeting including French, Soviet, UK and US experts (at which Henry Kissinger was present) prepared the ground for a secret back-channel involving French Pugwashites and Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet Cong. Code-named PENNSYLVANIA, this initiative had the support of Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara (later a Pugwashite), and President Johnson. McNamara later said this back-channel laid "the foundation for the start of the negotiations between North Vietnam and the US in Paris".

In recent years, Pugwash continues to serve as a bridge for dialogue across divides in areas of nuclear risk, in addition to its more traditional arms control/disarmament brief. It has held an ongoing series of "Track 2" discussions on the security problems in the Middle East, including the Iranian nuclear issue. Meetings between Indians and Pakistanis have promoted progress on Kashmir, nuclear issues and other confidence-building measures. In 2004, a Pugwash delegation visited Pyongyang and exchanged views on security developments in the region, followed by unofficial discussions.

## Widening horizons

In the Dagomys Declaration of 1988, entitled "Ensuring the Survival of Civilization", Pugwash called upon "all scientists to expand our concerns to a broad set of interrelated dangers: destruction of the environment on a global scale and denial of basic needs for a growing majority of mankind". It formally recognised "that environmental degradation and large-scale impoverishment are already facts and can lead to a massive catastrophe even if nuclear war is avoided."

*"Let me, in conclusion, remind you that the basic human value is life itself; the most important of human rights is the right to live. It is the duty of scientists to see to it that, through their work, life will not be put into peril, but will be made safe and its quality enhanced."*

Joseph Rotblat, Message to the Inheritors of the Manhattan Project  
12 July 2005

# Joseph Rotblat

It is difficult to write about Pugwash without mentioning Joseph Rotblat. He was a former member of the Manhattan Project, a pioneer of medical physics and one of the leading advocates of his time for the social responsibility of scientists. He was the only scientist to leave the Manhattan Project on moral grounds, which he did when it became clear that the Germans were not developing an atom bomb.

Rotblat worked tirelessly for the cause of peace, making a huge contribution to Pugwash workshops and producing numerous books on the desirability and feasibility of a nuclear-weapons-free world. His work significantly increased attention on the issue and led to the formation of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (1995), on which he served.

Rotblat often said that preparing for peace required education at every level. In his last years he increasingly saw the need to alert the public to the dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation. He therefore initiated the WMD Awareness Programme, a public education programme that worked in collaboration with other concerned NGOs. The Programme was launched by Joseph Rotblat and President Mikhail Gorbachev in 2004.

Always aware that he would not achieve his goals within his lifetime, Rotblat devoted considerable time to engaging with the younger generation and to mentoring students and young scientists. He nurtured an international Student/Young Pugwash movement as a counterpart to the senior organisation. As a Nobel Peace Laureate he also took part in the US PeaceJam education programme which he wished to bring to the UK. This was done by British Pugwash after his death. He died at the age of 96 on 31 August 2005.



## Rotblat and Pugwash

- 1957** Founding member of Pugwash
- 1957-1973** Secretary-General of Pugwash
- 1978-1988** Chair of British Pugwash Executive Committee
- 1988-1997** President of Pugwash
- 1995** Received Nobel Peace Prize jointly with Pugwash Conferences
- 1995** Elected a member of the Royal Society
- 1998** Knighted "for services to international understanding".

Joseph Rotblat and colleagues at the 17th Pugwash Conference, Ronneby, Sweden, 1967

# British Pugwash today

British Pugwash is carrying on the work that Joseph Rotblat and his colleagues began. Linking with experts from Pugwash's international network, we use scientific expertise to communicate with the government, parliament and the public on issues relating to weapons of mass destruction - especially nuclear weapons - disruptive emerging technologies, the environment and the social responsibility of scientists.

We believe that we are living in extremely challenging times. Many established patterns of domestic and international behaviour are being questioned. There are opportunities to influence political developments by urging that decisions should be based on good science and rationality.



Professor Carlo Rovelli delivered the annual Rotblat Lecture at the Hay Literary Festival, 2024

## Themes and projects

We conduct projects which both reflect our range of interests and commitments and respond to the changing scientific and political landscape. Our recent work includes:

## Education and outreach

- PeaceJam and Student / Young Pugwash (SYP) engage with young people, to inspire and empower them to take positive action for peace, and raise awareness of the challenges and dangers of nuclear weapons as well as emerging and disruptive technology. The 7th Annual SYP Conference was entitled "Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Peace and Security" and took place at King's College London in January 2024.

- Following a very successful lecture by Robert McNamara in 2005, an annual Joseph Rotblat Lecture was instituted at the Hay Festival. Subsequent lecturers have included: Martin Rees (2006), David Attenborough (2007), Phillipe Sands (2008), Lord Ashdown (2009), Mohammed El Baradei (2011), Rose Gottemoeller (2012), Hans Blix (2013), William Perry (2016), Jim Al-Khalili (2020), Margaret MacMillan (2021), Carlo Rovelli (2024) and most recently Mark Lynas (2025).



SYP Conference on AI: Implications for Peace and Security, King's College London, January 2024

Prof Dame Athene Donald gives a British Pugwash lecture at Cambridge University in May 2024.



- We regularly hold webinars and meetings to discuss a range of topics concerning international peace and security. Recent speakers include:

- Prof Dan Plesch and Manuel Galileo, 'Strategic Stability and Conventional Strikes'
- Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, 'China's Approach to Disarmament'
- Prof Dame Athene Donald, 'Reflections on the legacy of Sir Joseph Rotblat in a time of nuclear risk'
- Dr James Acton, 'Rising tensions: nuclear entanglement and escalation risks'
- Dr Steve Fetter, 'Reducing nuclear weapons and the risk of nuclear war'
- Prof Sir Hew Strachan, 'What does the invasion of Ukraine tell us about war, deterrence and escalation?'
- Prof Sir Ian Chapman, 'Power from Fusion- why the sudden excitement?'
- Shannon Bugos, Dr Tim Street and David Cullen, 'Nuclear weapons, the Ukraine conflict and beyond'
- Dr Rebecca Johnson and Ambassador Aidan Liddle, 'Nuclear arms control, disarmament, and the future of the NPT'

The majority of our events are available on our YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@britishpugwashoffice1467>

- Dr David Ellwood and Dr Peter Collecott have given several talks as part of the Physicists for Nuclear Risk Reduction initiative

## Expert meetings

- A member of the Executive Committee participates in meetings of the International Pugwash Council and we have hosted two meetings of European Pugwash members in recent years.

## Publications

- We produce briefings and analysis to provide scientific and policy input into decision making.

Our recent publications and outputs include:

- AI: Implications for Peace and Security, Articles from the SYP Conference
- Aspects of UK Nuclear Weapons Possession
- UK public opinion survey on nuclear weapons
- Updates on No First Use and reducing nuclear risk
- Climate change impacts on nuclear security

# Membership / Get Involved

*"Not this year, not in my lifetime, perhaps in yours, and with a strong possibility in my grandchildren's lifetimes, war will be seen as an unacceptable way of settling disputes between states."*

Robert Hinde, December 2008

Membership is open to everyone in the UK qualified by experience or inclination to contribute to, or support the work of, British Pugwash. A good number of our members are scientists, including many Fellows of the Royal Society, and engineers; but the participation of individuals from other backgrounds is valued.

We particularly welcome participation from students and young researchers. Apply to join here:

<https://britishpugwash.org/what-is-pugwash/join-british-pugwash/>

Our members have a wide range of interests: in controlling weapons of mass destruction, the militarisation of space, emerging technologies, international peace, climate science, and the ethical responsibilities of scientists.

We also help archive and digitise publications and photographs about the history of Pugwash Conference. The Collected Papers of Joseph Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences are housed at Churchill College's Archives at Cambridge University.

The British Pugwash website gives detailed accounts of our work and publications:

[www.britishpugwash.org](http://www.britishpugwash.org)

British Pugwash Office:  
Ground Floor Flat  
63a Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3BJ, UK

[office@britishpugwash.org](mailto:office@britishpugwash.org)  
[www.britishpugwash.org](http://www.britishpugwash.org)



Robert Hinde  
(former Chair of  
British Pugwash)  
and Mikhail  
Gorbachev

**British  
Pugwash**

Pugwash  
conferences  
on science and  
world affairs

**Student / Young  
Pugwash UK**