

The Nuns, The Priests, and The Bombs

Documentary Synopsis



In July 2012 three intruders broke into the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, known as America's "Fort Knox of Uranium". Y-12 stores enough highly enriched uranium to make some 10,000 nuclear bombs. The break-in, described by *The New York Times*, as the most serious security breach in the history of the U.S. atomic complex, sent shock waves throughout the federal government, when it turned out the intruders were an 82-year-old Catholic nun and two fellow peace activists. The trio succeeded in penetrating the heart of America's nuclear stockpile through the sheer power of their moral conviction and a pair of bolt cutters. There was a Plowshares protest designed to raise public consciousness on the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.



More than 25 years after the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons are, once again, at the center of world attention. The ongoing crisis between the U.S. and North Korea; the uncertain future of the Iran nuclear deal; and deteriorating U.S. relations with Russia, have all ratcheted up the tensions surrounding the world's 15,000 nuclear weapons.

While recent world events have captured the public's attention, for disarmament activists the struggle for abolition has never stopped. This film profiles the people on the frontlines of this movement. Since 1980 activists in lay and religious life have undertaken dramatic Plowshares protests, risking long prison terms, and even death in an ongoing campaign to move the world away from the nuclear brink. Plowshares is

derived from an injunction in the Bible, “They Shall Beat Their Swords into Plowshares”.



The break-in at Y-12 by Sister Megan Rice and two others was inspired by a Plowshares action at a U.S. naval base near Seattle less than three years earlier. The naval base houses the largest stockpile of active nuclear warheads in the country. Five activists, including a Catholic nun and two Jesuit priests, intruded onto the base reaching the nuclear warhead bunkers. The film follows the two federal criminal cases triggered by both incidents. It traces the activists’ legal efforts to justify their actions



under international law.

The film also follows diplomatic efforts at the United Nations in 2015 to effect implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), signed by the U.S. and four other nuclear-armed states more than 45 years ago. The NPT signatories pledged to abolish their nuclear weapons, a promise that remains unfulfilled. Instead, the nuclear-armed states have begun modernizing their arsenals. The American nuclear weapons modernization plan is estimated to cost more than \$1 trillion over the next 30 years. Last year, because of the lack of progress on the NPT, a majority of nations agreed to undertake negotiations on a treaty that would ban nuclear weapons.

On July 7, 2017, the United Nations adopted a new Treaty that prohibits the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The vote was 122 -1. The world’s nine nuclear-armed nations did not take part in the Treaty negotiations. Signature and ratification of the new Treaty will take place over the next two years.

