

April 4, 1958

**Letter from Nikita Khrushchev to Zhou Enlai on the
Prohibition of Nuclear Testing**

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Summary:

Khrushchev writes to Zhou outlining the Soviet Union's argument for the need to halt the testing of atomic weapons, and urges the Chinese to support and agree to the ban.

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[...]

Comrade Zhou Enlai, Premier of the People's Republic of China
Esteemed Comrade Premier:

In contemporary international relations, the most urgent issue and the issue that has attracted the special concern of hundreds of millions of people in countries around the world is the need to immediately halt the testing of various types of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons. It is easy to understand the feelings of profound concern among various strata of residents, from political activists and scholarly experts to common people, ordinary village workers and mothers, toward the continued carrying out of nuclear weapons explosive testing. Since these tests exacerbate the arms race and promote research on new, more destructive and more lethal nuclear weapons, they increasingly deepen the threat of atomic war that is facing by mankind.

Not only is this the case, but the frequent explosive testing of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons in the present period of peace is already harming the health of good, honest and innocent people of all countries. As pointed out in the letter of appeal that was signed by 9,235 academics in 44 countries and sent in January of this year to the Secretary General of the United Nations, every test of a nuclear explosive warhead increases radioactive dust, and therefore harms the health of the world's people and, moreover, threatens the normal development of future generations.

Based on this, the Soviet government has concluded that the issue of halting nuclear weapons testing cannot be put off further, since we cannot allow the health of mankind to suffer irreparable harm.

Now, still only three countries, the Soviet Union, the United States and Britain, possess nuclear weapons, so it is relatively easy to reach an agreement on halting the testing of nuclear weapons. If we do not halt nuclear testing now, with the passing of time, other countries may also possess nuclear weapons. In that situation, it will naturally become more complicated to reach an agreement on halting testing.

Over the past three years, the Soviet government has repeatedly proposed halting the testing of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons to the governments of the United States and Britain. Since the American and British governments were not willing to halt nuclear testing indefinitely, the Soviet government also proposed halting this kind of testing perhaps at the outset for a limited period, for instance, for two or three years. The Soviet government's proposal on this issue stipulated the establishment of required international supervision of the testing halt.

Despite all these efforts, regrettably, until now it has not been possible to reach an agreement on the indefinite halting of nuclear testing, or even on a temporary halt.

To make a concrete start [toward] a general halt in testing of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons, and therefore allow mankind to take a step toward the complete elimination of the threat of atomic warfare, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union has decided that the Soviet Union will halt testing of all types of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons.

To implement the Supreme Soviet resolution, the Soviet government has taken the decision to halt unilaterally all types of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons [testing] as of March 31, 1958.

The Soviet government has proposed that the U.S. and British governments join in

this step. In the common interest of all humankind, the Soviet government urges the government of the People's Republic of China to support this initiative.

If the governments of countries that presently possess nuclear weapons support the Soviet proposal, and, moreover, take the decision to refrain from testing again, then this question which deeply concerns all the people of the world will finally be resolved, and, as a result, we will take a big step toward establishing real trust among countries and strengthening peace.

However, if countries that possess nuclear weapons do not wish to respond to this decision by the Soviet government, but would rather keep on doing as they have been doing, and continue to carry out atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb testing, then, in this situation, the Soviet government, to guarantee its own security, will naturally have no other means than to conclude that it can no longer be bound by its undertaking to halt nuclear testing. But the Soviet government does not want this situation to arise.

In its letter of appeal to the governments of the United States and Britain, the Soviet government has made clear its hope that these governments will join in the Soviet initiative and make possible a permanent and universal halt in the testing of nuclear weapons.

This practical step to allow people to avoid the present threat of nuclear disaster will, to a great degree, advance the task of people of all countries to free themselves totally from threat of atomic war. No one can deny that halting testing of atomic weapons and hydrogen weapons indisputably will improve greatly the overall international political atmosphere and, moreover, will create even more favorable conditions for the resolution of other outstanding international questions.

Comrade Premier, I hope the above proposal of the Soviet government will be treated positively by the government of the People's Republic of China.

I convey my sincerest respect.

N. Khrushchev
April 4, 1958