

THREE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NSW/HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS A CONTINUING THREAT TO HUMAN SURVIVAL

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists at a ceremony at 11am Thursday Washington time (3am Friday Sydney time), has moved the hands of the iconic 'Doomsday Clock', which has been a barometer of the danger to humanity since 1947, by two minutes. It has gone from five minutes to midnight to three minutes to midnight. This is a level of danger that has not been present since 1984, at the height of the Cold War.

Midnight represents the end of civilisation and conceivably of humans as a species. The closest ever to midnight was two minutes back in 1953, at a time when the US planned actively to destroy the Soviet Union. Three minutes to midnight is the next-most-dangerous that the world has ever been.

A major factor in the Bulletin's decision to move the hands of the Doomsday Clock has also been intergovernmental inaction on climate change, meaning that already inadequate targets for emissions reductions are unlikely to be met.

Climate change of a different and opposite kind would be initiated by global nuclear war, with prolonged darkness and cold that would produce temperatures lower than those of the last ice-age and make agriculture impossible. Most humans would freeze and starve in the dark if they escaped being vaporised or fried in the first hour and a half's holocaust.

The consequences of nuclear weapons use were examined in excruciating detail in a recent international conference in Vienna (Dec8-9) hosted by the government of Austria, in which the dangers of accidental nuclear war (war by computer error), and the nuclear winter that would follow were explored by 158 governments including Australia's, and international experts.

The moving of the hands of the doomsday clock should be a call to urgent action by governments worldwide to take the apocalypse off the agenda, where it has been for the last sixty years.

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