

# **The Momentum for Abolition and a Nuclear Weapons Convention**

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**Address to PNND Conference**

**The Role of Parliamentarians in Advancing Nuclear Abolition**

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It cannot be denied that momentum is building up for the abolition of nuclear weapons and yet the obstacles to complete elimination are still enormous. We have reasons to be optimistic about getting to zero but remain deeply concerned about proliferation. The extraordinary U.N. Security Council summit of September 24, 2009 has empowered us, but not even President Obama yet seems capable of implementing his own rhetoric.

The field of nuclear disarmament is filled with contradictions. This is because moving to a nuclear weapons-free world represents a tectonic shift in how the world operates. The very powerful are being asked to give up that which makes them very powerful and this has never been done before in the history of the world. The proponents of nuclear weapons have always defended them as vital to security; now they have to face up to the fact that nuclear weapons are the ultimate insecurity.

No wonder the public is confused. The political and diplomatic processes labour under the conflicting dynamics. Progress seems halting. We need to stand back and regain our confidence by recognizing the historical momentum to abolition that *is* occurring.

In 1995, the Non-Proliferation Treaty was indefinitely extended with all parties agreeing to “systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons.” In 1996, the International Court of Justice, ruling that the use of nuclear weapons would generally contravene all aspects of humanitarian law, unanimously insisted that all states “pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.” In 2000, all NPT parties gave an “unequivocal undertaking” to total nuclear disarmament via a program of 13 Practical Steps.

These progressive building blocks were interrupted by the Bush years, which proved a serious setback for nuclear disarmament, but now the international community is once again focusing on the imperative of achieving security for all through the elimination of nuclear weapons. Last October, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for a “framework” of mutually reinforcing agreements or a Nuclear Weapons Convention backed by a strong system of verification. He called attention to the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, circulated by Costa Rica and Malaysia as a U.N. document a decade ago. Every year since 1997, the General

Assembly has adopted a resolution calling upon all states immediately to commence multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. In 2008, the number of co-sponsors doubled from 28 to 56, and the General Assembly adopted the resolution by 127 to 30 with 23 abstentions. At the General Assembly this year, 73 countries referred to nuclear disarmament issues in their opening statements; a year ago, the number was 17.

The reason for this revived interest is, of course, President Barack Obama, who brought to the White House his long-held vision of “a nuclear free world.” In his Prague speech of April, 2009, he stated his “commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” and pledged U.S. leadership. He convened the Security Council summit, which unanimously adopted Resolution XXXX, which begins with the words, “Resolving to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons...” Further, the president will convene a global summit on nuclear dangers next April. Suddenly, the prospects for a successful Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2010 have brightened.

All this is wonderful and we can relax, right? Just a minute. Examine more closely that opening paragraph of the Security Council resolution. It goes on to affirm the goals of the Non-Proliferation Treaty “in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all.” This is U.N. language that, in essence, means that if a country thinks its security will be weakened or compromised without nuclear weapons, it will retain them. The language is a carry-over from Cold War thinking, which revolved around the doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

Despite President Obama’s vision, nuclear defenders in the U.S. are determined that that country maintain a “safe, secure, effective and reliable nuclear deterrent.” Former U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Schlesinger is trying to frame the all-important U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, now being brought up to date, around the concept of “extended deterrence.” The U.S., it is argued, needs an effective, if smaller, nuclear arsenal to counter a nuclear threat anywhere.

This means that the U.S. would keep its nuclear weapons to protect not only itself but its allies who do not possess nuclear weapons. In other words, so the argument goes, the U.S. would be weakening itself and also letting down its friends if it gave up its nuclear weapons. If the nuclear defenders can get “extended deterrence” written into the new Nuclear Posture Review, scheduled for publication in December, this will stop Obama cold in his quest for a nuclear weapons-free world.

In short, Obama, no matter how well motivated, cannot bring us to a nuclear weapons free world alone. In addition to powerful domestic support, he needs strong international backing. The countries that are friends of the U.S. – those very states that are said to be depending on the U.S. nuclear umbrella – now need to speak up and blow away the phony “extended deterrence” argument.

It is not just the U.S. that needs to examine its doctrinal rigidity. The other nuclear weapons states do not appear ready to give up their adherence to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which underpins possession and justifies modernization of nuclear weapons. At first glance, the lengthy resolution points the world in the right direction, but stops short of making any commitment to actually eliminate nuclear weapons. Doubtless, hard negotiations were

involved just to get this far, and we certainly should not be churlish or grudging in expressing our gratitude that, at last, the Security Council has been seized of the paramount issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely avoiding blowing up huge sections of the world with nuclear warfare. But neither can we be complacent. For the resolution can lull us into thinking that such steps as the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and a verifiable ban on the production of fissile materials will be enough to achieve a nuclear weapons free world. Without a visible intent to link the steps to the goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons, we will proceed through the next decades with powerful states retaining their nuclear arsenals, even if diminished in numbers, while futilely trying to proscribe other states from acquiring nuclear weapons.

This institutional passivity by the powerful will exacerbate the biggest risk the world faces today: terrorists and other extremists getting hold of nuclear materials. More than 200 incidents of illicit trafficking, losses or thefts of such material were reported last year. It is only a matter of time before a terrorist nuclear attack occurs. The only sure way to shut off this threat – as indeed the only way to shut off the threat of nuclear warfare anywhere – is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Mohamed ElBarradei, the outgoing Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has put the issue squarely:

By demonstrating their irreversible commitment to achieving a world free from nuclear weapons, the weapons states can greatly contribute to the legitimacy of the non-proliferation regime and gain the moral authority to call on the rest of the world to curb the proliferation of these inhumane weapons.

The momentum in the quest for a nuclear weapons free world has now brought the Nuclear Weapons Convention into the spotlight. Though it cannot be completed overnight, the drive to achieve it must be intensified now. The efforts of the past three decades have shown conclusively that nuclear disarmament can only be achieved comprehensively. That is what a Nuclear Weapons Convention does. It would prohibit development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons anywhere. States possessing nuclear weapons would be required to destroy their arsenals according to a series of phases. The model contains detailed provisions for national implementation and verification; establishes an international agency responsible for enforcement and dispute settlement; and indicates procedures for reporting and addressing violations. Governments are, of course, the principal actors, but civil society would play an important role. The experience of many international and intergovernmental bodies would be useful. Moreover, the scientific, medical, legal, policy, and other expertise of NGOs would make them key partners in the process.

International polls show that people around the world overwhelmingly support the proposition that all countries should sign a treaty that prohibits all nuclear weapons. This general support is crystallizing into specific actions. PNND presented a Parliamentary Declaration Supporting a Nuclear Weapons Convention, which was sparked by a cross-party group of European parliamentarians, to the NPT Preparatory Committee meeting earlier this year. Mayors for Peace, which lists 3,147 mayors in 134 countries, is campaigning for the implementation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention by 2020. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has launched an International Campaign

to Abolish Nuclear Weapons through a convention. In Canada, 345 members of the Order of Canada, the country's highest civilian award, have endorsed a call for government action on a convention.

I urge you to help PNND lead the way in enlightening your colleagues on the new thinking required to sustain life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ask your ministers and officials exactly what in a Nuclear Weapons Convention is illogical, one-sided, or unworkable? Ask them exactly why a comprehensive treaty to ban nuclear weapons is unattainable when the world has already achieved a ban on chemical weapons and a ban on biological weapons. Ask them to explain the rationality of the sustainability of a two-class nuclear world. Hard answers to these questions are needed. As you probe in your parliaments with your questions, motions and resolutions, you will throw light on the logic, rationality and urgency of moving the world comprehensively to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

My experience as a parliamentarian has taught me that nothing will be accomplished without speaking up. The right idea at the right time will win respect. A new political moment has arrived that makes possible that which previously had only been dreamed of. Parliamentarians are leaders. I know what parliamentarians can do when you mobilize your strength. Governments dare not listen to you when you speak clearly and forcefully.

The abolition of nuclear weapons is no longer just a lofty goal, a noble aspiration, an idealistic thought. It has become the irreducible essential for survival. Peace is impossible as long as the threat of nuclear war hangs over our heads. A Nuclear Weapons Convention, prohibiting the production as well as use, of all nuclear weapons in all circumstances is urgently needed. Lawmakers – you – must lead the way in producing an ironclad global treaty prohibiting all nuclear weapons.

The end of slavery, colonialism and apartheid – all great evils of their time – came when a critical mass of public opinion arose. So too, the end of nuclear weapons, the ultimate evil, can be achieved when enough parliamentarians and civil society activists speak out.

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