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“Nuclear Weapons Are Unworthy of Civilization”

presentation by Jonathan Granoff
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on behalf of the civil society *Unfold Zero* campaign

on the occasion of the inaugural

International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

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Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Friends,

Senator Alan Cranston often said, “Nuclear weapons are unworthy of civilization.” If we contemplate the consequences of exploding on a civilian population any of the present 16,300 of these devices of death—the inferno, the radiation, the destruction in proportions beyond human reckoning—our sense of conscience and our sense of common humanity must compel us to act. Silence, equivocation, or procrastination in the face of this threat recreated each day, each moment, by nine countries, is complicity. Nuclear weapons are immoral, and therefore we must work together to eliminate them.

Mr. President, the convening of this high-level meeting is thus praiseworthy and it is an honor to speak here today.

Promises to seek the security of a nuclear weapons-free world abound. The unanimous decision of the International Court of Justice underlined that duty and declared it universal. Elementary considerations of humanity and conscience embodied in international humanitarian law highlight the prohibition of weapons of indiscriminate effect. By international treaties, biological and chemical weapons are banned.

But, imagine if the Biological Weapon Convention said that no state can use small pox or polio as a weapon but entrusts nine states to modernize the delivery, accuracy, and stockpiling of the plague as a weapon to pursue international order and security. Would that be coherent, equitable, sustainable, or wise?

Inequity and incoherence bring instability and coherence and equity bring stability.

The resolution convening us today properly “Calls for the urgent commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament” to obtain a comprehensive convention eliminating nuclear weapons. This process need not be limited to only one forum. The issue is indeed sufficiently critical that many forums—bilateral, multilateral, regional, and global—at diplomatic, military, ministerial, high level, and summit level should be devoting time, resources, and skills to moving forward. Also, discussions should include other forms of moving forward, such as a framework of instruments or a ban. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded us today: “What matters most is not which path is taken, but that the chosen path is heading in the right direction—towards the internationally agreed goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons.” We know this won’t be done overnight, but if we don’t start it won’t be done at all.

The valuable summits addressing the security of nuclear materials could also include in its agenda acceleration of the elimination of nuclear weapons or a series of summits on this urgent matter at the same level could be commenced.

Our real security interests are a stable climate, control of pandemic diseases, cybersecurity, building stable societies where human dignity flourishes, stable financial markets, elimination of poverty, healthy rainforests and oceans. These are the real security issues we face. Achieving success in these issues is our common good. The pursuit of our common good will help address numerous crises.

Recently we have seen increased appropriate attention to the climate. Failure on this issue is slow burn, slow death; nuclear weapons, fast burn, and fast death.

To adequately address the climate and other real threats, mature leadership that creates cooperation is needed. With respect to the climate there can be no “them.” We share the same air, there is just “us.” Nuclear weapons are not only dangerous and costly, but they are a wall where we need bridges. It is time to tear down this wall. Which nation, which leader, will step forward first, redefine security, pursue our common good, and move the nuclear disarmament negotiation process with appropriate speed?

Many believe it is all in God’s hands. I agree. But, it is also in our hands. Thank you.

Jonathan Granoff is President of the Global Security Institute representing Unfold Zero at this inaugural event and actively participates with Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament, United Religions Initiative, and the Middle Powers Initiative.

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