

The Vision of a Nuclear Weapons-Free World: Five Starting Points

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In 1961, U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev authorized their principal arms control negotiators, John M. McCloy and Valerian Zorin, to negotiate a framework for comprehensive disarmament. In five months, the American and Soviet teams produced a document, known as the McCloy-Zorin Principles, which committed the two superpowers to negotiate an agreement to “ensure that disarmament is general and complete and war is no longer an instrument for settling international problems.” Arms would be reduced, in a reliable and verifiable way, to the level needed to maintain internal order. In addition, they agreed to “support and provide agreed manpower for a United Nations peace force.” The framework document, agreed to by both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, was unanimously endorsed by the U.N. General Assembly. McCloy-Zorin opened the way to mutual acts to end the arms race, but the document was overtaken by the Vietnam War.

In 1978, the United Nations held the first of three Special Sessions on Disarmament, and the consensus Final Document (which some have called the “Bible” of nuclear disarmament) stated: “Nuclear weapons pose the greatest

danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization. It is essential to halt and reverse the nuclear arms race in all its aspects in order to avert the danger of war involving nuclear weapons.”

In 1982, a high-level Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, headed by Prime Minister Olof Palme of Sweden, issued a report, *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival*, that caught the attention of the international community. The theme of common security stems from one overriding conviction: in the nuclear age no nation can achieve true security by itself; technology has made the traditional concepts of security obsolete.

This theme was picked up a few years later when the two superpower presidents, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, agreed that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. Their summit in Reykjavik, which at least addressed the possibility of complete nuclear disarmament, was the high moment of the long quest for the elimination of these instruments of pure evil.

On the Canadian scene, I recall several great moments in which Canada stood up for peace: Lester Pearson criticizing the U.S. bombing of Vietnam; Pierre Trudeau’s peace mission to the five permanent members of the Security Council urging them to cease the nuclear arms race; Brian Mulroney saying no to Canadian involvement in the U.S. Star Wars program; Lloyd Axworthy’s leadership in developing the Landmines Treaty; Jean Chretien refusing to join the U.S. war in Iraq.

It is not my intention to dwell on “memory lane” in this speech. Rather, I have recounted these stellar moments of political vision from recent decades to challenge us as we survey the bleak global landscape today. What happened to the political vision that brought us the United Nations and its many agencies, the Marshall Plan, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the European Union, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the International Criminal Court, the Sustainable

Development Goals, the Paris Climate Accord? Is the vision of peace that produced such monumental accomplishments now to be buried by the prophets of doom who are currently bringing us a steady stream of nuclear modernization, global warming, terrorism, regional warfare, displaced people, authoritarianism, corruption?

Why do we accept such political blindness? Can we not cry out, as a unified civil society, for a recovery of the vision of common security? If governments today are mired in nationalisms and fears, then can we as civil society not produce the required vision to lead to a culture of peace? Indeed, we must project that vision if we are to reach our goal of a nuclear weapons-free world as the key to common security. Each of us needs to find — or re-find — the vision that first led us into the nuclear disarmament movement.

I wish to speak frankly, personally — and briefly — about the vision I have from the perspective of nearly 90 years. Often, through no fault of their own, the vision of old people becomes blurred. But that has not happened to me. I see the contours of peace sharply, and a practical program of nuclear disarmament, sustainable development and widespread human rights is etched in my mind.

Let me share with you five starting points for this vision.

1. Transforming World. The world is passing through the biggest transformation in history as humanity attempts to move from the old culture of war to a new culture of peace. This provides the basis for new hope that the long centuries of warfare and social injustices will give way to a more peaceful setting, even though we still see around us a fractured world. Moving from a past where war was considered the normal means of resolving conflict and exploitation of the vulnerable was socially acceptable to a future where global institutions guarantee sustainable peace is by far the biggest change humanity has ever experienced.

When the world shifted from the agricultural age to the industrial age, and again from the industrial to the technological era, these were huge transformations of society. Building a culture of peace out of the human proclivity for war is the biggest change of all. We ought to celebrate this framework for a culture of peace, because such an elevation of humanity has far greater consequences for the world than the acts of violence still occurring.

2. Building on Progress. The vision of peace I have is not based on some idealistic construct of the world, rather an assessment of the real progress that has already been made in strengthening the four pillars of the human security agenda: economic and social development, arms control and disarmament, environmental protection and the advancement of human rights. Great numbers of people are rejecting violence, eradicating poverty, strengthening the United Nations, keeping the peace in conflict areas, protecting the environment, developing renewable energy, extending human rights and laying the groundwork for a new generation of leaders with an instinctive understanding that all human beings have a right to live in peace.

3. Jarring Interruption. In such a mammoth transformation, we cannot expect progress in a straight line. Putting in place instruments to solidify peace and social justice is a complicated operation. Political experience has taught me that it isn't enough just to have a vision or hope for a fair and just world. We've got to work for it. Actually, we've got to resist those who are stealing from us the tantalizing prospects for a peaceful world. This particular moment is especially unnerving because the Trump administration is irrational and causing massive destabilizations in world affairs. The worst mistake we can make at this juncture is to lose confidence in our ability to strengthen the institutional machinery needed to sustain peace. We need fortitude to resist the disarray in the world. Just as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela stayed resolute in times of trial, we too must

persist in expressing indignation in creative ways. Governments that are stuck in the old order of militarism and economic inequities must be challenged. Their lackadaisical approach to building enforceable international law must give way to comprehensive programs of action for social justice.

4. Practical Action. A humanitarian movement, which produced the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, has emerged out of this transforming moment in world history. Sufficient numbers of people, within and outside governments, recognized their power in a globalized world of instant communication to fight back against the purveyors of nuclear weapons. The strength of human beings insisting that the very possession of nuclear weapons is a threat to peace achieved a breakthrough in the adoption of the Prohibition Treaty. This new legal instrument helps to shore up the crumbling Non-Proliferation Treaty. The disarmament movement in Canada has already called on the government to sign the Treaty and work with NATO to change its policies supporting the retention of nuclear weapons, policies based on the outmoded and totally false idea that they guarantee security. Now, with a federal election looming next year, we must step up our work to demand that all the political parties commit themselves to signing the Treaty as a tangible step towards fulfilling their Article VI obligations to the NPT and conclude comprehensive negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The time is ripe for a great new effort by civil society activists to press the Canadian government to respond to the growing concern of Canadians about looming nuclear catastrophe.

5. Faith. In my own case, I know that my faith has enabled me to keep my perspective through all the challenges of life, which, as I have said, are particularly burdensome today. Faith is usually identified in a religious manner. While the best of religion can be an uplifting force in addressing the problems of human security, I find that faith in the continued development of God's planet transcends

denominational frameworks. This beautiful planet, designed by a Creator surpassing human limitations, deserves utmost protection. And the people of this planet, every one of the 7.6 billion, inherently possess the right to live in peace and social justice. This struggle is bigger than me. It is bigger than religions. It is bigger than governments. I must find my footing in believing that I am part of the mysterious creation around me, a creation I can only relate to, not control. The griefs and anxieties, the joys and hopes of the world are mine because I share in the blossoming of humanity.