

# **Seizing New Possibilities for Nuclear Disarmament**

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**Address to Pax Christi Ireland**

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It is an honour for me to be here in Dublin under the auspices of Pax Christi Ireland. To receive an award from Pax Christi, whose world-wide work applying faith-based principles to human security issues is immensely respected, is a milestone in my life. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. In 1842, my great-grandfather Michael Roche left his home in County Mayo and sailed with his young bride Anne Keenan to the far off land that later became Canada. I often think of the courage it took to sail the Atlantic and homestead in the wilderness. How proud Michael and Anne would be to know that, 165 years later, their great-grandson would be honoured in the very land that I am sure never left their hearts. I accept this award with gratitude to Michael Roche and Anne Keenan.

I also want to pay tribute to the Government of Ireland, its leaders and officials for continued leadership in the long struggle to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Ireland's commitment to nuclear disarmament is well known and its leadership of the New Agenda Coalition deeply appreciated. As preparations commence for the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the voice of Ireland will be heard.

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With a new U.N. Secretary-General in office, a new High Representative for disarmament matters about to be named, and four of the

five Nuclear Weapon States undergoing changes in leadership, not least the United States, where a new President will take office in January, 2009, this is a moment to seize new possibilities for nuclear disarmament.

Because of the failure of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and the subsequent inability of the U.N. 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit to say anything about nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, a sense of despair swept over international gatherings. Pessimism, if not cynicism, became fashionable.

I contend, however, that as we look to the 2010 NPT Review there are grounds for optimism for three reasons: the historical tide, an existing near consensus on key points, and political developments.

In historical terms, the tide is turning against nuclear weapons. The moral, legal and military case against them is now better understood than ever before. The intellectual argument – that nuclear weapons are needed for security – is now largely rejected as baseless. Only a small coterie of defenders of nuclear weapons can be found today. We know that this coterie still possess immense political power, as the fight over the modernization of the Trident in the U.K. revealed. But the U.K. government's reckless and blind determination to modernize its nuclear arsenal ran up against

unprecedented opposition. The opponents of nuclear weapons are gathering strength. That itself is a new reason for hope.

A roadmap to the future has been superbly drawn by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, headed by the Swedish diplomat Hans Blix. The Commission's 60 recommendations provide the architecture for global security without nuclear weapons. Proposals have been made to resolve thorny questions of the fuel cycle and proliferation challenges, advance implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution, and suggest steps both nuclear and non-nuclear countries can take.

This week, the Middle Powers Initiative will convene in Vienna the fourth meeting of the Article VI forum. This is a forum of 25 like-minded states that examines the legal, political and technical requirements for a nuclear weapons-free world. It takes its name from the article of the Non-Proliferation Treaty requiring states to negotiate in good faith the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Previous meetings of the Article VI forum were held at the United Nations, New York, The Hague and Ottawa. Already MPI has identified and examined five priority measures:

- Full ratification and entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

- Immediate negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.
- Standing down (de-alerting) of U.S. and Russian nuclear forces and elimination of the launch-on-warning option from nuclear war plans.
- Legal assurances of non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states.
- Strengthening systems for the verification of reduction and elimination of nuclear arsenals, notably U.S. and Russian arsenals.

The world is closer to a consensus on key steps in nuclear disarmament than is sometimes realized. In 2006, all but four states in the U.N. voted for the holdout states to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiate a ban on the production of fissile materials, diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies, reduce the operational status of nuclear forces, and take other practical steps.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has promised vigorous leadership from the U.N. Coming from South Korea and understanding well that the proliferation of nuclear weapons in his part of the world can only be stopped by unified world action, Ban Ki-moon is well placed to lead. He needs to set out an agenda for nuclear disarmament in the same way that Boutros Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace* and *An Agenda for Development* 15 years ago. Hans Blix has called for a World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass

destruction; Ban Ki-moon should make such a summit happen, perhaps in 2009, to boost the prospects for a successful 2010 NPT Review Conference. Above all, Ban Ki-moon must use his access to heads of governments to get nuclear disarmament a higher political priority. It is the job of civil society to spur on the new Secretary-General.

The new leaders of the U.S., Russia, the U.K. and France can all be influenced by Ban Ki-moon. He is excellently placed to also influence China. If the Big 5 can agree on concrete steps, India, Pakistan and Israel will not be far behind. The political prospects for action on nuclear disarmament may well improve in the immediate future.

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Civil society is the key to reducing nuclear dangers in the world. How to awaken the public to demand action should be a prime consideration.

In the late 1990s, when the campaign to ban land-mines hit full stride, the public responded, especially when people saw the photos of children maimed while playing in fields where explosives were buried. One could hear the cries of many to the politicians: “Do something!” But there are few similar outbursts against the 27,000 nuclear weapons in existence because there are no modern pictures of the human suffering they could cause.

The catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been practically forgotten.

Preventive diplomacy can have no higher purpose than to avert a nuclear war, which would cause unimaginable human suffering and a global economic meltdown. Without photos of such a calamity, civil society groups, such as Abolition 2000, working on this problem are appealing to the conscience of humanity.

A rising public demand for nations to get on with negotiations and implement a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban the production and deployment of all nuclear weapons may take hold at some point. If this happens, it will be because the global conscience on the immorality and illegality of nuclear weapons has fully awakened.

When speaking about nuclear weapons, former Secretary-General Annan said the world had reached a crossroads. One path could take us to a world in which the proliferation of nuclear weapons is restricted and reversed through trust, dialogue and negotiated agreement. The other path leads to a world in which rapidly growing numbers of states feel obliged to arm themselves with nuclear weapons, increasing the threat of nuclear terrorism.

The international community seems almost to be sleepwalking down the latter path – not by conscious choice but rather through miscalculation, sterile debate and the paralysis of multilateral mechanisms for confidence-building and conflict resolution.

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Annan's description of the crossroads applies to the whole question of war itself. We now have the mechanisms to avert and limit war; indeed, progress has been made. But the conflict-resolution processes are still a veneer over the habitual recourse to war, and so wars keep breaking out. Human society has yet to resolve to go down the path to peace with all that that implies: cooperation, dialogue, reconciliation, laws. And yet the movement away from militarism has clearly begun. But we, meaning society as a whole, still lack the wisdom, the patience, the courage to forthrightly march down the path to peace that the consciences of increasing numbers of people tell us we must. We need to believe that peace is possible.

Deadly conflict is not inevitable. There is no inherent biological component of our nature that produces violence. Biology does not predestine us to war and violence. Violence on the scale of what we have seen in Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan does not emerge inexorably from human interaction. War is a product of our culture. A wide range of factors can lead to war: weak, corrupt or collapsed states;



illegitimate or repressive regimes; violent discrimination against ethnic groups; religious extremism; lack of resources; large stores of ammunition.

All these factors surface when tensions mount because society still accepts that, in given conditions, war is necessary. The machinery we have in hand to prevent war – the U.N. Charter, mediation and arbitration techniques, peace-keeping forces – seem inadequate because they are not fully utilized. When they are, the potential for violence can be defused.

In short, war and mass violence usually result from deliberate political decisions. These decisions need to be infused with a culture of peace -- an approach to life that seeks to transform a culture that tends toward war and violence into one in which dialogue, respect and fairness govern social relations. If, as UNESCO says, war begins in our minds, then peace must begin in our minds too.

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The elimination of nuclear weapons needs an architecture of peace to ensure that global security can be achieved and maintained without nuclear weapons. We need to maintain our hope that God's planet will not be devastated by nuclear warfare. But hope alone is not enough. Each one of us must work to make that hope a reality.