

THE ENVIRONMENT AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Green Party on the Cutting Edge of History

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**Address to Green Party of Canada
Foreign Policy Conference**

Ottawa, February 17, 2007

The world has entered the Second Nuclear Age and is sleepwalking towards a possible nuclear weapons catastrophe.

That is the warning given by increasing numbers of experts. It is time for Canada to wake up and realize what is happening in the world.

- On January 17, 2007, the minute hand of the famous “Doomsday Clock” of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was moved from seven to five minutes to midnight, signifying the deteriorating state of nuclear disarmament. The Atomic Scientists said; “Not since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices.”

- On November 28, 2006, Kofi Annan, just before leaving his office as Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that the nuclear weapons threat is “the greatest danger” the world faces. He stated: “I said earlier this year that we are ‘sleepwalking towards disaster.’ In truth, it is worse than that – we are asleep at the controls of a fast-moving aircraft. Unless we wake up and take control, the outcome is all too predictable.”

- On November 19, 2006, the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates excoriated the flaunting of disarmament obligations by nuclear weapons states, which want to keep their nuclear weapons indefinitely while condemning others wanting to acquire them. “The current situation is more

dangerous than during the Cold War. ... As Nobel Peace Laureates, conscience requires us to raise our voices, inspire humankind, and demand change in state policies.”

- On January 4, 2007, a remarkable op-ed article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, signed by four prominent American figures, George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, Republicans, and William J. Perry and Sam Nunn, Democrats, who have all held high posts in the U.S. government. They warned “the world is now on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era.” In an unprecedented move, they called for the abolition of nuclear weapons and quoted President Ronald Reagan’s condemnation of nuclear weapons as “totally irrational, totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilization.”

The nuclear weapons headlines of the day focus on North Korea and Iran. Let it be clearly stated: neither North Korea nor Iran nor any other state should join the nuclear weapons club. But those states are flash points off of a volcano. The volcano is the 27,000 nuclear weapons now possessed by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the U.S., Russia, the U.K., France and China, and India, Pakistan and Israel. Hans Blix, Chairman of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, warns

that these stocks of nuclear weapons remain “extraordinarily and alarmingly high.”

The Cold War is long over, but half the world’s population still lives under a government that brandishes nuclear weapons. More than \$12 trillion has so far been spent on these instruments of mass murder, which is a theft from the poorest people of the world. Rather than being held only for deterrence purposes as in the Cold War, nuclear weapons are now being modernized for war-fighting purposes. The possibility of terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons is real, and no major city in the world is safe from the threat of a terrorist nuclear attack. The risk of accident multiplies daily. All these are the characteristics of the Second Nuclear Age.

A nuclear two-class world in which a few powerful states aggrandize unto themselves the right to possess nuclear weapons while proscribing their acquisition by any other state is about to become permanent. This status quo is unsustainable. As the U.N. Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change put it: “We are approaching a point at which the erosion of the non-proliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation.”

Continued high spending on nuclear weapons in the light of the magnitude of human needs in the world represents the single most

significant perversion of fiscal priorities today. Yet states, influenced by the tentacles of the military-industrial complex, pursue this madness. The arms merchants trade on fear. There must always be an enemy. Thus the public is manipulated into thinking that huge nuclear arsenals are necessary for security. It will only end when enough people stand up and state clearly to governments: “We’re not going to do this anymore.”

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What is the role of the Green Party of Canada in addressing the nuclear weapons danger?

The Green Party puts the environment at the centre of its agenda, and the expertise of its leader, Elizabeth May, is a distinct addition to elevated political discourse. In protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development, the Green Party should also highlight the imperative of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The party can lead in advancing the human security agenda by focusing on this paramount issue.

If, God forbid, there is a nuclear conflagration, the development, the environment, the human rights work engaged in today by the advanced wing of civil society will be swept away. The global economic collapse that will follow nuclear warfare will doom millions more to chaotic lives and poverty in addition to those directly killed and injured. In short, it is in the interests

of those working for environmental protection, sustainable development and the advancement of human rights to raise their voices against nuclear weapons, which threaten to undermine the very structures of civilization.

In moving the Doomsday Clock ahead two minutes, the Atomic Scientists linked the two issues of nuclear weapons and the environment: “We have concluded that the dangers posed by climate change are nearly as dire as those posed by nuclear weapons.”

Already, the Green Party’s policy on nuclear weapons is that “Canada should be declared a nuclear weapon-free country.” This worthy concept now needs to be developed. I offer three areas to focus on: nuclear energy, Canada and NATO, and immediate steps for Canada to take.

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Every effort should be made to reduce the growing dependence on nuclear power. The same reactors that produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes also can give bombs their destructive force of many thousands of tons of high explosive. Although nuclear energy has enabled humanitarian benefits, e.g., diagnosing and curing cancer and providing disease-resistant crops, it also creates a legacy of serious long-lasting environmental and health problems.

Since the Non-Proliferation Treaty guarantees the “inalienable right” of states parties to research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and since more states are demanding access to nuclear power to satisfy burgeoning energy needs driven by expanding populations, a debate over the efficacy of nuclear power will not stop the rush to build new civilian reactors. Six Arab states, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE, are embarking on programs to master atomic technology, preparing the way for the rapid spread of nuclear reactors in one of the world’s most unstable regions. New commercial-scale uranium enrichment projects have been announced in Argentina, Australia and South Africa. Nuclear power is here – at least until states begin properly funding the development of alternate sources of energy to bypass both carbon and nuclear sources. Such funding should certainly be done, but, meanwhile, the nuclear weapons crisis is so serious that we cannot wait for the day when nuclear power is phased down.

It is essential to ensure that states cannot use the Non-Proliferation Treaty to produce nuclear weapons under cover of a civilian nuclear power program. Nuclear fuels should be controlled by an authoritative multilateral agency, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In today’s political climate, it does not appear possible to do this, but it is

possible to make the IAEA a guarantor for the supply of fissile material for civilian use in the developing countries (e.g. Iran and its Middle East neighbours) that so desire. To get this process started, states should surrender their right to construct such reprocessing facilities and voluntarily institute a moratorium on the construction of enrichment or reprocessing facilities. However, these countries will only cooperate in restricting their right to develop nuclear energy (thus cutting off any possibility of developing a nuclear bomb) if they see the major nuclear states fulfilling their obligation to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons. Non-proliferation and disarmament are inextricably linked. The Green Party should drive this point home.

The Green Party should, of course, promote policies to support renewable energy sources and energy conservation leading to the development of an international sustainable energy agency. But it should couple to this a complementary policy of having Canada politically and financially strengthen the role of the IAEA to ensure that nuclear fuels never find their way into bombs. That would be an immediate contribution to relieving the terrible anxieties over the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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A recent survey of global public opinion showed that 83 percent of Canadians “strongly agree” that all countries should sign a treaty that prohibits all nuclear weapons (another 8 percent “somewhat agree”). Most Canadians think that Canada, which never developed nuclear weapons, is already a nuclear weapon-free country. Unfortunately, this is not correct.

As a member of NATO, Canada supports the Alliance’s nuclear weapons policies, which hold that nuclear weapons are “essential” and the “supreme guarantee” of security. NATO exercises this policy by maintaining 480 tactical nuclear weapons on the soil of Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands and Turkey, all ostensibly non-nuclear weapons countries, as well as in the U.K. Russia will not negotiate the elimination of its huge stocks of tactical nuclear weapons until NATO shows a willingness to remove its nuclear weapons from the European countries. With NATO continually enlarging eastwards, the numbers of countries committed to supporting and planning the use of nuclear weapons is actually increasing; this is the reverse of creating a Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone.

Moreover, NATO supports U.S. policy that its nuclear weapons “provide credible military options to deter a wide range of threats,” including chemical and biological weapons. The U.S. is modernizing its entire nuclear arsenal, and the Bush administration’s spending plan for fiscal

2008 includes a more than three-fold increase in funds for the development of a next-generation nuclear warhead. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara has called the U.S. nuclear weapons policy “immoral, illegal, and dreadfully dangerous.”

Canadian government policy has always been in support of the elimination of nuclear weapons. Canada is a staunch defender of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and worked toward the successful NPT Review Conference in 2000 which agreed to an “unequivocal undertaking” to the total elimination of nuclear weapons via a program of 13 Practical Steps. In short, Canada, wearing its NPT hat, supports nuclear weapons abolition; but wearing its NATO hat, supports the retention of nuclear weapons as “essential.” These two policies are not only contradictory, they are incoherent and severely constrain Canadian action towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Unless NATO policy is changed, Canada cannot, with any degree of integrity, declare itself a nuclear weapons-free country. NATO policy must change. Canada tried to do this in 1999, but was rebuffed. In the light of escalating nuclear weapons dangers, the Canadian government should spearhead a new effort, working with other like-minded states, to get NATO

out of the nefarious nuclear weapons business. Unless it does, its criticism of Iran, North Korea and other nuclear aspirants is hollow.

Here the Green Party is well placed to point up to the Canadian public NATO's dangerous incoherence and build public support to force the government to act.

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The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs hosted in Ottawa in September, 2006 a meeting of the Article VI Forum, convened by the Middle Powers Initiative. The Article VI Forum, which arose out of the failed 2005 NPT Review Conference, is designed to have like-minded states examine the political, legal and technical elements for a nuclear weapons-free world. At the Ottawa meeting, representatives of 25 states dug into five technical areas where progress on nuclear disarmament can be made: the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, taking U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons off alert status, legally-binding guarantees by nuclear weapons states not to attack non-nuclear states, and enhanced verification techniques. All of these steps are ripe for action.

While all the nuclear weapons states are dragging their feet, it is the U.S., under the Bush administration, that is adamantly opposing real nuclear disarmament action. As the most powerful military state in the world by far,

it is essential to have the U.S. participate. This can best be done not by attacking existing U.S. policies but by the world community continuing to advance a workable plan for nuclear disarmament that would be a win-win for both nuclear haves and have-nots.

A workable plan was agreed to at the 2000 NPT Review Conference and supported by the U.S. under the Clinton administration. Its chief elements, endorsed at the Article VI Forum meeting in Ottawa, are now promoted by leading Republicans who see the folly of the Bush administration's unilateralism and undermining of international law. The steps on which a near-consensus already exists would build the architecture to ensure global security without reliance on nuclear weapons. This would be a win-win for every state. The prospect of a win-win is now motivating leading American organizations and individuals, whose progressive views need to be buttressed by the international community.

Canada must get over its present hand-wringing posture that nothing can be done because of the Bush intransigence. There is much that can be done by working coalitions of like-minded states, such as the New Agenda Coalition, to build the conditions for a nuclear weapons-free world. The Canadian people want their government to play a leading and active role in

ridding the world of nuclear weapons, which have rightly been called the “ultimate evil.”

In their deepening concern over climate change and other environmental problems, Canadians are now ready to listen to the Green Party. The party has the talent, the credibility and the passion to wake up Canada to a renewed call for the abolition of nuclear weapons through practical steps already identified by world experts. In bringing environmental concern and nuclear weapons together, the Green Party can be on the cutting edge of history.