

The Power of Parliamentarians in Nuclear Disarmament

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I consider it an honour to set foot on the soil of Kazakhstan, a country both courageous and far-sighted enough to shun nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan is a major force in the growing movement for a nuclear weapons free world. As President Obama said, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev is "one of the model leaders of the world" on nuclear non-proliferation and safety issues. All countries should listen to President Nazarbayev, who has said: "Kazakhstan's experience shows that nations reap huge benefits from turning their backs on nuclear weapons. I have no doubt that we are a more prosperous, stable country, with more influence and friends in the world because of our decision."

The 2012 Astana-Semipalatinsk Forum provides an excellent opportunity for parliamentarians from around the world to be inspired by the

experience of Kazakhstan and urge your governments to commence work on a legal and political framework to ban all nuclear weapons globally.

History is calling us to a nuclear weapons free world. Kazakhstan has already given its answer and now is playing a leading role gathering parliamentarians to assert your role as the guardians for current and future generations, with the capacity to influence policy and build political momentum.. There are many positive elements we can build on.

Already, more than three-quarters of the countries of the world have voted for a United Nations resolution calling for the commencement of negotiations leading to the conclusion of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Support comes from across the geo-political spectrum, including from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and parts of Europe, and includes support from some of the countries possessing nuclear weapons, including China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Also, the polls of the Abolition 2000 organization show that more than 80 percent of the people in the nuclear weapons states and their allies support a Nuclear Weapons Convention. More support is coming from such important groups as the Inter-Action Council – 20 former Heads of State from key countries, including the United States, Canada, Norway, Germany, Japan and Mexico; and the December 2011 Summit of Leaders of Latin American and Caribbean States. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has put forward a nuclear disarmament plan with a primary call for countries to commence negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and has circulated a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention as a guide for such negotiations. Resolutions supporting a Nuclear Weapons Convention and the Secretary-General's plan have been adopted in the European Parliament, several national parliaments,

and by the Inter-Parliamentary Union representing 150 parliaments. Now is the time to move from resolutions to action.

A global speaking tour last year convinced me that the world is moving into a new stage in the long quest to eliminate nuclear weapons. A weakened rationale for nuclear weapons in our increasingly interconnected society is providing renewed traction for nuclear disarmament. Also, chronic deficits and other economic realities make nuclear weapons increasingly unaffordable. The agreement by the nuclear weapon states at the 2010 NPT Review Conference to “to accelerate concrete progress on steps leading to nuclear disarmament” and on a number of measures to implement this, are steps in the right direction.

However, the core of the problem remains; the nuclear weapons states and their allies continue to maintain nuclear deterrence as a central component of their security policies and most of them are thus unwilling to commence negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Without progress on a comprehensive approach to nuclear disarmament, other states are unwilling to accept partial measures that place them at a disadvantage and still threatened by the nuclear-use policies of the nuclear states. Thus, the Conference on Disarmament, the primary multilateral negotiating body for disarmament, has been unable to undertake any substantive work for more than 16 years.

Parliamentarians in countries under nuclear deterrence doctrines thus have a special responsibility to critique the continued validity of nuclear deterrence and to explore and advance non-nuclear alternatives. The importance of such work has been highlighted in the 2009 US Nuclear

Posture Review and in the unprecedented Summit of the UN Security Council in 2009, which unanimously resolved “to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.” .

A key agreement of the 2010 NPT Review Conference was that “all states need to make special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.” It’s no longer sufficient for non-nuclear countries to stand on the sidelines encouraging the nuclear states to disarm, and getting frustrated at the lack of substantive action. It’s no longer acceptable for the whole world to wait another 16 or 60 years before the nuclear states agree to start deliberations and negotiations on nuclear weapons abolition. Inter-governmental work must start now on the legal, technical, institutional and political elements to ban nuclear weapons and create a nuclear-weapons free world. Such work can pave the way for actual negotiations on a nuclear Weapons Convention.

Last year Austria, Mexico and Norway proposed a process whereby the UN General Assembly could start work on comprehensive nuclear disarmament if the Conference on Disarmament remained inactive. There was insufficient political support for this proposal to be adopted in 2011. Parliamentarians can play a role in building political support for this to be adopted at a future UN General Assembly.

To help pave the way for formal negotiations, the Middle Powers Initiative has launched the Framework Forum – a series of conferences of middle power governments to explore the elements for a nuclear-weapons-free world, implement some of those measures that don’t require immediate consensus by all nuclear weapons states, and help create the conditions for

the replacement of nuclear deterrence with alternative cooperative security arrangements. MPI, along with PNND, is now organizing a conference of middle power governments on this very topic hosted by the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin in early 2013. Parliamentarians can support this process by encouraging their governments to participate and exploring these issues in their parliaments.

The growing threat of nuclear proliferation to both states and non-state actors creates an imperative to undertake this work. So too does the conclusion of the International Court of Justice and the International Committee of the Red Cross that the use of nuclear weapons could scarcely be reconcilable with international humanitarian law. Moreover, the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty expressed “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons,” and reaffirmed the need for “all states at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.”

Parliamentarians must show, through action in their own legislatures, that global leadership in the 21st century will belong to those who are creative and persistent in devising public policies that meet the demand for true human security. This means better trading and finance laws to develop economies and drive out corruption; to stop the ravages of global warming and extend the fullness of human rights; to establish that security is better obtained by the processes of sustainable development rather than building more arms factories. Through their own commitment and access to the levers of power, parliamentarians can bring sanity to international relations through comprehensive negotiations for a global legal ban to provide a system of mutual, assured and verifiable nuclear disarmament.

The 2012 Astana-Semipalatinsk Forum could stimulate government action by supporting a new leadership initiative for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Today's leaders of key middle power countries should look at what the Six-Nation Initiative did. In 1984, the leaders of six non-nuclear states (Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania), in what became known as the Six-Nation Initiative, launched a diplomatic campaign to press Washington and Moscow toward nuclear disarmament. The personal involvement of such luminaries as Olof Palme of Sweden, Miguel del la Madrid of Mexico, and Indira and Rajiv Gandhi of India caught the attention of the world media. The stepped-up nuclear disarmament negotiations of the late 1980s – including the Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Reykjavik of 1986, at which the American and Russian leaders very nearly agreed to abolish all nuclear weapons, but instead listened to the paranoid opinions of their advisers – can be traced back to the Six-Nation Initiative. Mikhail Gorbachev referred to the urgings of the Initiative when he extended the test moratorium of the Soviet Union.

The draft Parliamentary Appeal before this conference, outlines practical approaches for parliamentarians to encourage and support nuclear abolition. Parliamentarians will also be greatly helped by the new IPU Handbook on Nuclear Disarmament, prepared through the outstanding work of PNND, which provides examples of good practices in parliaments around the world and recommendations for further action.

Now is the moment to curtail the spending of huge budgets on these inhumane, unusable weapons at the expense of continued development of all societies. 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 the use of nuclear weapons in all circumstances is urgently needed.

It will take a combination of enlightened governments, more knowledgeable parliamentarians, and the steady development of civil society activists to build a world agenda for peace, starting with the elimination of nuclear weapons, that not even the recalcitrant elements of the military-industrial complex can counter. Nuclear disarmament is a social movement, and social movements when they mature become unstoppable. The end of slavery, colonialism and apartheid are all examples of social movements that, at first, were ignored by establishment thinking, then vigorously opposed before at last becoming a basis for a new social order. We are moving forward.

The worst thing that anti-nuclear weapons campaigners could do at this moment would be to lose heart that the forces against nuclear disarmament are too powerful to overcome, that the nuclear mountain is too big to climb. The nuclear disarmament movement must maintain confidence that it is on the right side of history.