

Building a New Disarmament Age

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“Challenges of the Second Nuclear Age:
Preserving Multilateralism, Advancing Disarmament”**

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The nuclear weapons situation in the world today should cause us a deep sense of foreboding:

- Nuclear capability is being incorporated into conventional war planning.
- New nuclear weapons are being worked on.
- The Non-Proliferation Treaty is not stopping proliferation.

The Mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiba, says:

We stand today on the brink of hyper-proliferation and perhaps of repeating the third actual use of nuclear weapons. As the Mayor of Hiroshima, I can assure you that the path we are walking leads to unspeakable violence and misery for us all.

It seems that a Second Nuclear age has begun. Instead of taking us forward, we are going backward. Instead of progress towards elimination, we are seeing the dismantling of the non-proliferation regime, constructed so laboriously over the past three decades.

Though the nuclear weapons abolition movement has entered a new moment of anxiety, we must not despair that our goal can be reached. In fact, we should take heart from the widespread aversion to war that was manifest by millions of people around the world in the peace marches of 2003. Our challenge is to communicate with these same people and to provide the information they need about present nuclear dangers. The U.N.

Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education is very helpful because it recognizes the crucial link between disarmament and other international issues and seeks to raise the level of public engagement through education.

The nuclear powers would not be able to so blithely carry on with their nuclear weapons programs if world consciousness, raised out of the war culture to a new recognition of the evil of nuclear weapons, demanded abolition. But world consciousness has been dulled. We have lived with the bomb so long that it has insinuated itself into our thinking. Hiroshima and Nagasaki seem so long ago, and are but a blur in memory.

The abolition movement seeks to open the eyes of governments and the public to what the former President of the International Court of Justice, Judge Mohammed Bedjaoui, called “the ultimate evil.” Society is certainly not impervious to evil: the Holocaust, slavery, and genocide have all been recognized as the evils they truly are. But the ultimate evil appears to be too far removed from daily life to engage our attention. It is almost as if the issue is too big to handle.

Let us put the case straight-forward. The moral argument against nuclear weapons must be emphasized. Nuclear weapons not only assault life

on the planet, they assault the planet itself, and in so doing they assault the process of the continuing development of the planet.

During the Cold War, political acceptance of nuclear weapons to deter “the enemy” became the overriding consideration. After the Cold War, the nuclear establishment had to find a new enemy to justify the retention of nuclear weapons. This time the enemy is some political leader or terrorist, now or in the future, who will threaten the use of a nuclear weapon. The circle of fear, perpetuated by those with a vested interest in maintaining nuclear weapons, is unending. Unchallenged, this is a trap from which humanity will never escape.

We must now challenge the nuclear proponents for, in clinging to spurious, self-serving rationales, they are deliberately deceiving the world. Humanity faces the gravest of futures if the world is to be ruled by militarism and the culture of war rather than law. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence can no longer claim the slightest shred of moral acceptance: it is morally bankrupt.

Similarly, in the legal realm, the time has come for governments to formally declare that the use of nuclear weapons is unlawful based upon the rules of international humanitarian law. A world ruled by law is the only hope for a peace with security and stability. The International Court of

Justice ruled that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would contravene all aspects of humanitarian law and called for negotiations toward total elimination to be concluded. The work of the New Agenda Coalition and like-minded countries is making comprehensive negotiations possible. There is no excuse for any delay in starting them. By reinforcing the NPT at the 2005 Review – and certainly not accepting any despondent view that the Treaty is hopelessly crippled – we will be setting the stage to make comprehensive negotiations possible.

Nuclear weapons cannot, of course, be abolished in a vacuum. An architecture for multilateral security must be built: verification procedures, mechanisms to combat cheating, and an enforceable rule of law. The nuclear proponents say they cannot divest as long as there are regional conflicts that hold back the development of an architecture that can guarantee security without nuclear weapons. This argument, too, must be turned on its head. The determined maintenance of nuclear weapons by the powerful few is the factor that inhibits the processes of building the conditions for peace in regions of conflict.

Dear colleagues, this is the 25th Anniversary of the U.N.'s First Special Session on Disarmament. I was present on that occasion, and I recall the hope engendered by the Final Document. Produced by

negotiations that led to an “historic consensus,” the Programme of Action called for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. UNSSOD I closed with these stirring words:

Removing the threat of a world war – a nuclear war – is the most acute and urgent task of the present day. Mankind is confronted with a choice: we must halt the arms race and proceed to disarmament or face annihilation.

The words still ring true today. We must challenge the nuclear retentionists on the immorality and illegality of nuclear weapons and not let them deceive the public that nuclear weapons can be used without slaughtering countless innocent people. We must insist that governments live up to their commitments to implement the 13 Practical Steps to the elimination of nuclear weapons. We must say to the nuclear weapons powers: “Enough! Turn back from the disastrous course you are on.”

Let us, finally, reject the Second Nuclear Age with its inexorable global proliferation of nuclear weapons. Let us turn this moment into a new Disarmament Age and muster the collective resolve to fulfil it.