

Global Peace and Nuclear Disarmament

By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

**Address to 16th Annual Model United Nations Assembly
Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton, March 5, 2011**

Since 1945, when the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by atomic bombs, the world has lived with the threat of nuclear warfare. During the Cold War years, when the number of nuclear weapons exceeded 65,000, most with a firepower far greater than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, people lived in constant fear of a nuclear attack. But when the Cold War ended in 1989, many thought the nuclear weapons problem had receded to the sidelines. How wrong they were.

Today, eight states—the US, Russia, the UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, and Israel—together possess a total of more than 22,000 warheads, at 111 sites in 14 countries. More than half of the world's population lives in a nuclear weapons country. The controversies surrounding North Korea's and Iran's nuclear actions pose additional problems. Over the years, various world commissions have elaborated a common theme: As long as any one state has nuclear weapons, others will want them; as long as they keep spreading in the world, the danger of use goes up; any use of a nuclear bomb would be a catastrophe for humanity.

A terrorist nuclear attack could occur at any time. U.S. President Barack Obama warned at the 2010 Washington Summit that stolen nuclear materials could easily be fashioned into a nuclear weapon: “Just the smallest amount of plutonium—about the size of an apple—could kill and injure hundreds of thousands of innocent people.” Terrorist networks such as al Qaeda are always trying to acquire the material for a nuclear weapon. Such use, the president added, “would be a catastrophe for the world—causing extraordinary loss of life, and striking a major blow to global peace and stability.

What a Nuclear Weapon Does

It takes a reminder every so often of exactly what a nuclear weapon does, to restore a human rather than mechanistic response to instruments of mass murder—which is what nuclear weapons should be called. Dr. Marcel Junod, a Red Cross doctor, was the first foreign doctor in Hiroshima to assess the effects of the atomic bombing. “We witnessed a sight totally unlike anything we had ever seen before. The centre of the city was a sort of white patch, flattened and smooth like the palm of a hand. Nothing remained...Thousands of human beings in the streets and gardens in the town centre, struck by a wave of intense heat, died like flies. Others lay writhing like worms, atrociously burned...Every living thing was petrified in an attitude of acute pain.” There was virtually no medical help available because most of the doctors, nurses, and pharmacists had been killed. The transportation, food distribution, and water systems were all destroyed. Survivors of the attack faced life-threatening dehydration, diarrhea, and gastrointestinal tract infections. The radiation generated by the blast produced cancers and genetic damage in survivors and future generations.

Jacob Kellenberger, current head of the International Red Cross, says

“Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time, in the risks of escalation they create, and in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity.” Since the suffering from nuclear warfare is more than any civilization can bear, “the rights of states must yield to the interests of humanity.” The nuclear weapons debate, he said, “must ultimately be about human beings, about the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law, and about the collective future of humanity.” This is precisely the approach long taken by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 1985 Nobel Peace Prize winner, in warning that a nuclear war would produce an unlivable world. IPPNW recently brought out a new study, providing an “unvarnished understanding” of the prospects of nuclear famine, nuclear winter, and nuclear mass murder unless nuclear weapons are abolished.

Nuclear Famine. Even a limited nuclear war in one region, for example, South Asia, would result in millions of deaths, firestorms with soot rising into the upper troposphere, cooling temperatures, and a significant decline in food production. Prices for basic foods would shoot up, making food inaccessible to poor people in much of the world. Famine on this scale would also lead to major epidemics of infectious diseases, and would create immense potential for mass migrations, civil conflict and war.

Nuclear Ozone Hole. Soot from burning cities in a nuclear war would severely damage the Earth’s protective ozone layer. Large losses in stratospheric ozone would permit more ultraviolet radiation to reach us, with severe consequences such as skin cancers, crop damage, and destruction of marine phytoplankton. The effects would persist for years.

Nuclear Winter. Two decades ago, the renowned scientist Carl Sagan

coined the term “nuclear winter” to describe the global ecological destruction that would result from a massive nuclear exchange between the US and the former Soviet Union. A nuclear war would be followed by rapid drops in temperature and precipitation, blocked sunlight, and the collapse of agricultural production for at least a year, leading to death by starvation for huge numbers of the world’s population. New studies have found that nuclear winter would be even longer than previously thought, with the decrease in food production lasting for many years.

Casualties of Nuclear War. In the decades following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the medical effects of nuclear weapons have been documented in painstaking detail. In addition to killing virtually everyone within one kilometre, the blast would turn bricks, lumber, furniture, and cars into deadly missiles. The injured would suffer massive burns, ruptured organs, and fractured skulls, and would be blinded and deafened. The radiation exposure would produce diseases, in both the present and future generations.

No Law Banning Nuclear Weapons

How can nations that pride themselves on their civilization descend to the barbarism of nuclear weapons? A short answer is that our governmental process has not yet matured to the point of protecting people against omnicide, the death of all. An individual murder on a street corner, yes. But fireball death from the skies indiscriminately killing thousands, no. It is hard to believe that in the 21st century, when successful globalization depends on the uninterrupted interplay of commerce and politics, there is no law prohibiting nuclear weapons that would destroy the very fabric of modern life.

In 1996, the International Court of Justice (World Court) gave an advisory opinion that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons would generally contravene all aspects of humanitarian law. One of the Court’s foremost jurists,

Judge Christopher Weeramantry, wrote: “Nuclear weapons contradict the fundamental principle of the dignity and worth of the human person on which all law depends.” And the weapons “endanger the human environment in a manner which threatens the entirety of life on the planet.”

Unfortunately, the Court’s opinions are not binding. Although there are global treaties banning chemical weapons and biological weapons, there has never been a global law prohibiting nuclear weapons. The best that the Non-Proliferation Treaty can do is to call for the pursuit of negotiations for elimination. The World Court said such comprehensive negotiations must be “concluded.” They have not yet even started.

But at least the world community has now identified the need for a global legal ban on all nuclear weapons, which would take the form of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has shown the urgency he attaches to a convention (or framework agreement) by campaigning for it.

A Model Treaty Exists

A Nuclear Weapons Convention would be a global ban: an enforceable international treaty to ban all nuclear weapons. It is not just a vision. A model treaty already exists. A group of experts in law, science, disarmament, and negotiation drafted a model treaty and it is now circulating as a U.N. document. The model treaty was the basis of a book, *Securing Our Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention*. In the foreword, Judge Weeramantry called the logic of the model treaty “unassailable.”

The model treaty begins with the words, “We the peoples of the Earth, through the states parties to this convention...” and continues with powerful preambular language affirming that the very existence of nuclear weapons

“generates a climate of suspicion and fear which is antagonistic to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights.”

It lays down the obligations of states. “Each state party to this Convention undertakes never under any circumstances to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.” This is spelled out to ensure states will not “develop, test, produce, otherwise acquire, deploy, stockpile, retain, or transfer” nuclear materials or delivery vehicles and will not fund nuclear weapons research. Further, states would destroy the nuclear weapons they possess. Turning to the obligations of persons, the treaty would make it a crime for any person to engage in the development, testing and production of nuclear weapons. The definitions of various nuclear materials, facilities, activities, and delivery vehicles are listed.

The model treaty specifies five time periods for full implementation. In Phase One, not later than one year after entry into force of the treaty, all states shall have declared the number and location of all nuclear materials, and ceased production of all nuclear weapons components. In Phase Two (not more than two years after entry into force), all nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles shall be removed from deployment sites. In Phase Three (five years), the US and Russia will be permitted no more than 1,000 nuclear warheads, and the UK, France, and China no more than 100. In Phase Four (10 years), the US and Russia will bring their nuclear stockpiles down to fifty each, and the UK, France, and China down to ten each. Other nuclear weapons possessors would reduce in similar proportions. All reactors using highly enriched uranium or plutonium would be closed or converted to low-enriched uranium use. In Phase Five (15 years), “all nuclear weapons shall be destroyed.”

All this disarmament activity would be supervised by an International Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons established by the Convention and verified by an international monitoring system composed of professional

inspectors. Basic information would be gathered, prescribed disarmament steps monitored, and re-armament prevented through detection of any objects or activities indicating a nuclear weapons capability. Whistle-blowers would be encouraged. Emerging technologies, including satellite photography, better radioisotope monitoring, and real-time data communications systems provide increasing capacity for the necessary confidence-building.

Opposition Is Still Strong

Although President Obama charted a course to a nuclear weapons free world in his 2009 Prague speech, some former senior U.S. officials are blocking the way and even claiming that the president is undermining the security of the nation with his talk of nuclear zero. Former US Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, who describes himself as a nuclear realist, says the US will continue to need a strong deterrent “more or less in perpetuity.” The notion that we can abolish nuclear weapons “reflects on a combination of American utopianism and American parochialism...It’s not based upon an understanding of reality.” Two of his former senior officials, Douglas Feith and Abram Shulsky, claim that America’s allies would lose confidence in a US that lost its determination to maintain a nuclear umbrella over its friends. “This will likely spur nuclear proliferation—not discourage it.” Besides, they said, Obama’s policy would make it harder for the government to maintain its nuclear infrastructure. “Why should a bright young scientist or engineer enter a dying field—especially when innovation is discouraged by support for a ban on weapons testing, and by renunciation of new weapons development?”

Other critics, like Senator James M. Inhofe of Oklahoma, maintain that a nuclear-free world is a dangerous fantasy and the US dare not forego constantly updating its remaining stockpile of nuclear weapons to make them safer and more

reliable. Even with Obama's announcements of increased funding for the nuclear weapons complex, the Republican leadership in the Senate held up ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for months. Clearly, were Obama to push hard for action now on global zero, he would set off a firestorm of protest in Congress, and the present charges against him that he is a weak dreamer would escalate to accusations of recklessness. The continuation of his presidency would be in doubt if the idea took hold in the public that he was jeopardizing the security of the American people. The conservative-oriented talk shows on radio and TV, fascinated with the simplistic anti-government fulminations of the reactionary Tea Party movement, have amply demonstrated their capability to magnify marginal protests to a roaring crescendo.

The essence of Obama's position—that nuclear weapons detract from, not add to, security—would be lost in the howls of the ignorant, who have long believed the propaganda of their own government that their safety depends on the US's winning the nuclear arms race. It may be true that most Americans, when asked the question directly, favour a global treaty to ban all nuclear weapons, but this abstract approval is trumped by the fear driven into the populace by 9/11 and the need to fend off al Qaeda with all the might the country possesses. The fact that nuclear weapons cannot stamp out terrorism, whose seeds are found in communities all over the world, including the US, does not carry much weight among those who see such weaponry as the pinnacle of strength. And in these dangerous times, they yell, strength, not weakness, is needed.

The Role of Youth

Despite the naysayers, a Nuclear Weapons Convention is gaining popular support rapidly. At the UN, two-thirds of all national governments have voted in favour of negotiating a convention. In 21 countries, including the five major

nuclear powers, polls show that 76 per cent of people support the negotiation of a ban. The European Parliament has voted for a convention, along with a number of national parliaments. Mayors for Peace, comprising more than 4,500 cities around the world, is campaigning for it. Long lists of non-governmental organizations want it. In Japan, 14 million people signed a petition for it. There is no doubt that historical momentum is building up.

The role for young people is clear. It is your world, your 21st century we are talking about. The amount of youth activity in the nuclear disarmament field would surprise those who think that the bomb is not an issue for the new generation. A 2010 survey of 4,362 youth from their teens through their thirties in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, New Zealand, the US, and the UK showed that 67.3 per cent of the respondents held that the use of nuclear weapons was not admissible under any circumstances and 59.1 per cent said they would feel safer if nuclear weapons were abolished. Many young people attended the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York, participating in activities that were both boisterous and thoughtful. “I came to New York to raise my voice against the existence of nuclear weapons,” said Inga Kravchik of St. Petersburg, Russia. “I’m here with an awesome team of students from all around Germany producing daily video interviews with diplomats and NGO reports for our website,” said Jacob Romer of Germany.

Today’s young generation has the double advantage of understanding nuclear weapons in a more holistic way and of being able to communicate your concerns and plans instantaneously. The integrated agenda of human rights and Facebook and Twitter intersect in your generation. You are empowered, as no generation before you, to influence public policy so that it preserves and protects human life everywhere by prohibiting the very instruments that would desecrate the planet. But you have to think big. And that is my challenge to you -- the

future lawyers, doctors, scientists, teachers, religious leaders and media experts.

Think about the underlying questions I have raised here today. Does the elimination of nuclear weapons require a new era of enlightened cooperation in which nations share the resources of the planet more equitably and willingly put themselves under the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice? Or would pragmatic acceptance of the merits of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, implemented in stages, contribute to the evolution of such international thinking? Which comes first: nuclear disarmament, or a new security architecture? The defenders of nuclear weapons answer that there are too many risks in today's world to let go of nuclear weapons. Nuclear disarmament advocates must show that the reverse is true: the continued existence of nuclear weapons is a principal detriment to building a secure world.

A New Debate on Nuclear Weapons

As the ideas of a culture of peace, centering on non-violence, slowly take hold in society, a future, more informed public debate may force the political system to face its responsibility to avoid war. The debate inevitably will centre on the deeply controversial question of the future of nuclear weapons.

For a long time, the nuclear disarmament debate consisted of abolitionists arguing with nuclear defenders over the pace of reductions. Technocrats always won those arguments, because they premised their case for nuclear deterrence as having value. It had the value, they said, of preventing nuclear war. That was the reason to maintain arsenals, so serious nuclear disarmament had to be put off to another day. But a new day arrived with the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty consensus Final Document's expressing its deep concern at the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and stipulating "the need for all states at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international

humanitarian law.” With the international community now focused as never before on the inherent inhumanity of nuclear weapons, the legal justification for their retention is crumbling.

There is much to be gained by recognizing that a two-class nuclear world is not sustainable. The world of globalization, in which humans are increasingly functioning as “one big family,” cannot abide a situation in which one group asserts its right to stock weapons of mass destruction while it makes others abstain.

Abolitionists sometimes refer to possession of nuclear weapons as belonging to the same genre of social evil as slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. In none of these other social evils was a partial solution possible. There could not be just a little bit of slavery, or discrimination against only some blacks, or just a few colonies forcibly maintained by the big powers. The architecture of these evils had to be swept away. The architecture of nuclear weapons—the idea that we need to threaten mass killing to prevent war—now needs to be dismantled; it cannot withstand the intellectual or moral scrutiny of a new generation of human rights advocates.

The logic of the human rights argument, however, is not enough by itself. The elimination of nuclear weapons requires what former U.S. President Jimmy Carter calls the “aggressive, persistent, and demanding” work of civil society in claiming its full human rights. Moreover, the struggle for abolition must be seen in the context of the wide agenda of human security problems. The nuclear weapons problem does not exist in a vacuum. It is competing for attention in a field of challenges: chronic armed conflict, economic disruption, burgeoning pollution and climate change, energy deficits, unrelenting hunger, and grossly inadequate health and education services. All these subjects constantly demand public attention. Nuclear disarmament should not be viewed as just one more issue. This problem has the potential to destroy the structure of the world on which all the other

problems depend for their solution.

The greatest threat to the environment by far would be a nuclear war. The poor of the world will be incalculably worse off in the aftermath of a nuclear attack in any region. The parade of steady human rights advances will be swept aside by the imposition of a drastic curtailment of civil rights following a nuclear blast. The campaigners for the other elements of the human security agenda should promote nuclear disarmament as a priority in meeting their own goals.

When the abolition of nuclear weapons is presented through the prism of human rights, the world will stand a better chance of getting a global ban in place. The public needs to understand that nuclear weapons and human rights cannot co-exist. You can spread that understanding.