

The Power of Parliamentarians in Abolishing Nuclear Weapons

**Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
to Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation
and Disarmament conference
“Parliamentary Actions for a Nuclear Weapons-free World”**

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When Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) started in 2000, the world was a far more hopeful place than today. That was the year the NPT Review Conference unanimously agreed to an “unequivocal undertaking” to the elimination of nuclear weapons through a program of 13 Practical Steps. The faint outline of a nuclear weapons-free world appeared on the horizon.

That hopeful moment nearly twenty years ago has given way, alarmingly, to the current review cycle in which it will be considered progress just to keep the NPT alive. Only a month ago, the U.N. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, told the Security Council, “[T]he prospect of the use of nuclear weapons is higher than it has been in generations.”

That statement sent my mind on a journey backward in time to the darkest days of the Cold War. In the early 1980s, when I was a Canadian parliamentarian and served as Chairman of Parliamentarians for Global Action, I led delegations of parliamentarians to Moscow and Washington to plead with the superpowers of the day to take serious steps toward nuclear disarmament. Our work led to the formation of the Six-Nation Initiative. This was a cooperative effort by the leaders of India, Mexico, Argentina, Sweden, Greece and Tanzania, who held summit meetings urging the nuclear powers to halt production of their nuclear stocks. Gorbachev later said the Six-Nation Initiative was a key factor in the achievement of the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which eliminated a whole class of medium-range nuclear missiles. Now the INF is about to disappear.

Parliamentarians for Global Action developed into a network of 1,000 parliamentarians in 130 countries and branched out on an expanded list of global issues, such as fostering democracy, conflict prevention, international law and human rights, population, and environment.

When the Middle Powers Initiative started its work of encouraging the middle-power states to press the nuclear powers to fulfil their obligations to Article VI of the NPT, we realized a special grouping of parliamentarians dedicated to nuclear disarmament was needed to keep the pressure on governments and to advance multi-lateral legislative action on key disarmament initiatives. That is why we launched PNND.

Under the visionary coordination of Alyn Ware, PNND has become a global, cross-party network of 800 parliamentarians from 80 countries working to reduce nuclear risks, prevent nuclear proliferation and achieve nuclear disarmament. I was honoured to be the founding chairperson. The next five Co-Presidents of PNND were all accomplished female parliamentarians, a wonderful example of the leadership of women in this field.

One of PNND's accomplishments has been collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a huge umbrella group of parliaments from 178 countries, including from most of the nuclear-armed and allied states. PNND has moved the IPU assembly to support nuclear risk-reduction measures including de-alerting and no-first-use, and nuclear disarmament measures including a nuclear weapons convention. PNND has also worked with IPU to produce a handbook on nuclear disarmament which was circulated to all member parliaments, and more recently a Parliamentary Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapons-Free World.. This is a form of leadership that doesn't make headlines but is extremely effective.

The voice of parliamentarians may in the future become stronger if the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly takes hold. The campaign hopes that some day citizens of all countries would be able to directly elect their representatives to sit in a new assembly at the UN and legislate global policies. This may not happen until we reach another stage of history, but a transitional step could be the selection of

delegates from national parliaments, who would be empowered to sit in a new assembly at the U.N. and raise issues directly with the Security Council. The European Parliament, in which direct election of its 751 members takes place in the constituent countries, offers a precedent for a global parliamentary assembly.

Even without waiting for future developments to enhance global governance, parliamentarians today can and must use their unique position in government structures to push for humanitarian policies to protect life on earth.

The adoption of regional nuclear-weapon-free zones over more than half the globe, the recent UN Human Rights Committee decision on nuclear weapons violating the Right to Life, and the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons show that the march of history is moving against the possession, not only the use, of nuclear weapons by any state. The nuclear weapons states are trying to block this march before it acquires any more momentum. But they will fail. They can stall the nuclear disarmament processes, but they cannot obliterate the transformation moment in human history now occurring.

The reason that the nuclear disarmament movement is stronger than it appears on the surface is that it stems from the gradual awakening of conscience taking place in the world. Driven forward by science and technology and a new understanding of the inherency of human rights, an integration of humanity is occurring. Not only do we know one another across what used to be great divides, but we also know that we

need one another for common survival. There is a new caring for the human condition and the state of the planet evident in such programs as the Sustainable Development Goals. This is the awakening of a global conscience.

A higher level of thinking is bringing a new potency to the nuclear disarmament debate. Increasingly, nuclear weapons are seen not as instruments of state security but as violators of human security. More and more, it is becoming apparent that nuclear weapons and human rights cannot co-exist on the planet.

Advocacy by parliamentarians works. Parliamentarians are well placed not only to lobby for new initiatives but to follow through on their implementation. They are uniquely placed to challenge present policies, present alternatives and generally hold governments accountable. Parliamentarians hold more power than they often realize. However, they need to be informed and even pushed by civil society to take such action. This is why the partnerships PNND establishes with civil society organizations are so important, and elevate the impact of parliamentary action. We invite you to deepen your engagement with PNND.

Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C., former Canadian Senator and former Ambassador for Disarmament, was founding Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, which started the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. He is the author of Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World.

