

Pugwash and Nuclear Disarmament:

A Call to Humanity

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Address to Canadian Pugwash Group Conference:

“The Way Forward to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons”

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When I addressed the Pugwash conference at the Thinkers’ Lodge three years ago, I listed five reasons why nuclear disarmament has not been achieved.

1. Duplicity of the nuclear weapons states and NATO.
2. Timidity of the non-nuclear weapons states.
3. Irresponsible media.
4. Weary and confused public opinion
5. Lack of religious, academic and business leadership.

These points could, indeed, be reprised, but I think we need to move on and figure out how the Pugwash movement – which has so consistently stood for a nuclear weapons-free world -- can effectively issue a new call to humanity stating clearly that the world desperately needs a global law

against nuclear weapons before they kill us all. That is my single message today: **the urgent need for a global law against nuclear weapons.**

This subject has many components, so again, I have grouped my thoughts under five headings:

1. Viewing the whole iceberg.
2. Human solidarity: “Remember Your Humanity.”
3. Canada: A new cycle of history.
4. Linking a ban to a convention.
5. A definable goal to energize public opinion.

1. Viewing the Whole Iceberg. The 2015 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty collapsed over the Middle East issue. Or so the public was led to believe from the meager scraps of information the media provided. I am not going to use up my time here re-tracing the tortuous attempts since 1995 to coax, if not force, Israel into joining negotiations to make the Middle East a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The Middle East is the tip of a huge NPT iceberg and the essential problems of the NPT lie below the surface.

The central issue in the 45-year history of the NPT is the obligation under Article VI to enter into good faith negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We must keep driving this point home.

When the treaty was indefinitely extended in 1995, states made three promises: to achieve a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by 1996; to bring to an “early conclusion” negotiations banning the production of fissile

material for nuclear weapons; to pursue with determination “systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons.” A CTBT still has not entered into force, negotiations for a fissile material cut-off have not even started, and, though the global total of nuclear weapons has been cut to 15,850, the nuclear weapons states’ modernization programs are ensuring that nuclear weapons, costing more than \$100 billion a year, will be retained for the rest of the 21st century. It is shocking that 1,800 nuclear weapons are still kept in a state of high operational alert. The danger of use by accident, design or terrorism grows daily. Is there anyone here today who truly believes that terrorists will not one day set off a nuclear device?

For the past 20 years, the nuclear weapons states, impervious to public opinion, have made a mockery of Article VI, despite the action in 1996 by the International Court of Justice in upholding the legal obligation to conclude nuclear negotiations for elimination. They are shameless in thwarting comprehensive negotiations, which have been called for (through UN votes) by three-quarters of the nations of the world. Seventy years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons remain a source of political power, 55 percent of the world population still lives under a nuclear umbrella, and the proponents of nuclear deterrence insist (to a mostly gullible public) that they keep the peace. Nuclear incrementalism has pushed elimination so far into the future that the policy has proven to be a fraud. Unsurprisingly, the mood throughout the NPT debates was sour.

2. Human Solidarity: “Remember Your Humanity.” A new source of hope has arisen with the development of the humanitarian movement. In the run-up to the 2015 review, more than 150 states participated in a series of international conferences (held in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna), which detailed

at length the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” of the use of nuclear weapons. At the review, speech after speech drummed home this point. One paragraph from a Working Paper submitted by Austria and a number of states captured the essence of the common cry: “The overwhelming call by the international community for urgent progress towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the only way to avoid the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons is a fact that must be acknowledged. It is the motivating force to the destination promised in the NPT – a world without nuclear weapons.”

One would think such a heart-felt appeal would touch the consciences of the nuclear states. But “conscientious nuclear states” may be the greatest oxymoron of all time. A consequence of implementing the humanitarian appeal would be the rejection of the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence – the core issue in this tangled web of deceit. The nuclear weapons states insist on stocking sufficient nuclear weapons to be able to successfully retaliate against an enemy who first launches a nuclear attack. This translates into a creed that says as long as nuclear weapons exist, “we” (name your nuclear state) must retain ours.

It is a bankrupt argument, but the major players get away with it because the non-nuclear weapons states are so cowed by the heavyweights that they refuse to stand up to them in the international arena. When was the last time the leaders of leading non-nuclear states actually went together to Washington and Moscow and demanded, in the name of humanity and sustainable development for all peoples, that nuclear weapons be entirely eliminated by law?

The modern humanitarian movement should resonate with all in the Pugwash movement, for we have never lost sight of the stirring words

concluding the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto: “We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest.” The new focus on human solidarity comes from our increased understanding of the implementation of human rights in a globalized world. Humanity, exhibiting a rising global conscience, is gradually coming to a better understanding of common security. This is the moment to press forward the humanitarian approach to a global law prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons.

3. Canada: A New Cycle of History. Canada likes to say it supports the NPT. But this support is ambiguous at best. Canada adheres to NATO policy, which still maintains nuclear weapons are the “supreme guarantee” of its security. It is as if the Cold War never ended. The policies of NATO are incompatible with the “unequivocal undertaking” to the elimination of nuclear weapons given by all NPT members in 2000. Canada is trying to have it both ways: to support nuclear disarmament in general as long as nuclear deterrence is not challenged.

One looks in vain at the speeches Canada made at the NPT review for any sign of agreement (let alone involvement) with the New Agenda Coalition, a grouping of progressive states, which issued calls for work to begin on “legal approaches” to nuclear disarmament. Instead, the government sent its UN ambassador to the final meeting to denounce the effort to pressure Israel through the holding of a Middle East conference, and subsequently issued a press release completely ignoring the humanitarian call for legal action to eliminate nuclear weapons. Moreover, the Canadian government continues to ignore the unanimous motion adopted by both houses of Parliament in 2010, calling for Canadian support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and the similar call by more than 800

members of the Order of Canada. Canada, which in 1999 actually tried to get NATO to change its nuclear policies, has truly lost its way in nuclear disarmament.

We must overcome our discouragement with current Canadian policies and plan for a new cycle of Canadian history. It is imperative that Canadian Pugwash continue to make informed and progressive recommendations to all the political parties in the hope that a new day of enlightenment is not far off.

4. Linking a Ban to a Convention. The humanitarian movement wants a process to start to build a legal framework to abolish nuclear weapons. But there is uncertainty about exactly how to proceed.

By the end of the review, 107 states, led by Austria, had signed onto a Humanitarian Pledge, “to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons...” The draft Final Document moved in this direction. It contained a passage calling for a new working group to identify “legal provisions” to contribute to a nuclear weapons-free world. But even this vaguely worded proposal (which did not pass because the Final Document lacked unanimity) stipulated that the work would be done by consensus – meaning that the recalcitrant nuclear weapons states would still be able to block progress.

The International Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) vigorously criticized the draft Final Document as “unacceptably weak” on nuclear disarmament. That is a mild reproof compared to the way I feel. The NPT review conferences have become a merry-go-round, with clanging bells and riders jumping up and down, circling endlessly and going nowhere.

Based on the performance of nine reviews, the NPT by itself is unlikely to take us to a nuclear weapons-free world; nonetheless, we cannot

reach the goal by abandoning this bedrock treaty. A new process is needed to activate the NPT. Thus, look for a UNGA resolution this fall to call for an Open-Ended Working Group to hold urgent discussions as a preparation for the International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament scheduled for 2018. Once again, such a working group would be blocked by the nuclear weapons states from taking real action by the consensus rule.

Recognizing that the nuclear weapons states have amply demonstrated their non-cooperation, ICAN wants like-minded states to go ahead on their own and construct a treaty “banning” nuclear weapons, even though such a ban would not be legally binding on the nuclear states. Many civil society activists are so frustrated by the hostile opposition of the nuclear weapons states that they believe developing a “legal ban” (even without their participation) would raise the global norm against nuclear weapons. Would the stigmatization of these weapons then act as a lever to press the nuclear weapons states to join in active negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention -- which would be a global multilateral treaty prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons with the participation of the nuclear states? Nobody knows the answer to that question.

Here, the plot, as they say in novels, thickens. Many governments hold that producing a ban treaty without the participation of the very states possessing nuclear weapons would be ineffective, not to mention misleading the public into thinking the nuclear weapons menace has gone away. Even Austria, the leader of the humanitarian movement, has so far shown no signs that it will actually call a meeting of like-minded states to start negotiations for a legal ban. Civil society experts are themselves divided over the efficacy of a ban treaty. While many support it (again because of intense frustration at the disarmament roadblocks), others believe the international

community should stick to pursuing the goal of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, or at the very least a framework of agreements that would, in sum, amount to a global law against nuclear weapons.

An either/or mentality currently prevents like-minded states and civil society from mounting a concentrated effort. It is not only the Non-Proliferation Treaty that is broken; the nuclear disarmament movement is bogged down.

I believe some bridges now need to be built and the result could be of historic importance.

First, there is no need to see the ban treaty and a Nuclear Weapons Convention in opposition to each other. A ban, supported by the majority of states which sincerely want a nuclear weapons-free world, could conceivably de-legitimize nuclear weapons and be a foundation stone for a convention. In this sense, working on a ban is a political strategy to opening the door to a convention. If a ban came into being, it could act as a stimulant to increasing the vital verification and compliance work, thus increasing confidence, needed to bring the nuclear weapons states into the orbit. We are certainly not getting any progress towards a convention now, so why not attempt to construct a ban, limited as it would be?

Second, in constructing a ban, the nuclear disarmament leaders, both governmental and civil, need to keep open a bridge to the nuclear weapons states. They must find language and actions to show that they are not defying the nuclear powers, rather responding to the humanitarian call and building an architecture to support a global law against nuclear weapons.

Third, a credible country -- I have in mind Ireland, the father of the NPT -- should step forward and call a conference of like-minded states, including the participation of key parliamentarians and civil society leaders,

to create a working agenda for a negotiating process to fill the current legal gap. In other words let like-minded states, collaborating with civil society experts, work together to determine the best legal route to a nuclear weapons-free world. Immediate work on constructing an agenda would implicitly be the first step toward actual negotiations to legally move from aspiration to reality. It would be a candle definitely worth lighting in the present darkness.

5. A Definable Goal to Energize Public Opinion. We want the public to put pressure on the political order, of course, but how is the public to be motivated to action when the nuclear disarmament movement itself is so uncertain? We must find a unity among civil society leaders and enlightened governments to chart a clear course of action.

It is often said that the endings of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid are 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. The new humanitarian efforts are in the process of making nuclear disarmament a social movement. This movement needs a definable goal, one the public can rally around. The public needs to understand the clear-cut goal of a law against nuclear weapons before we can expect public opinion to force legislation.

When independence came to India in 1948, when civil rights legislation passed in the US in 1964, when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, when apartheid in South Africa gave way in 1993 to demands for freedom -- all these accomplishments were made possible because demanding publics had a definable goal. Rising public opinion coalesced behind a leader – Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mikhail Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, – and the social movements became unstoppable.

The nuclear disarmament movement today has neither a definable goal nor a towering leader. But it does have many leading thinkers and activists, who should create a coherent message out of all the ideas now on the table for a ban or a convention or some bridge between both. With a message the public can understand – **the world desperately needs a global law against nuclear weapons before they kill us all** -- public opinion may well spill onto the front pages. It won't be long then before a political star appears to lead a legislative charge. Nuclear disarmament is not impossible. We must find a legal route.
