

“Disarm for a Climate of Peace”

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“A NUCLEAR WEAPON FREE WORLD - MIRAGE OR ACHIEVABLE TARGET?” Jayantha Dhanapala

I bring with me greetings and good wishes from the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs as its President to the International Peace Bureau (IPB). We are two fraternal civil society organizations which, together with others, comprise that alternate super-power with the potential to bend the arc of history. International civil society can change the world - armed only with the power of our ideas and exerting the pressure of global public opinion. The IPB is the world's oldest and most comprehensive civil society coalition dedicated to the cause of peace and disarmament. It was founded in 1891 and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910 while Pugwash, established in 1957 received the same award in 1995.

Apart from the institutional links I have a strong personal link with the IPB having been its Honorary President from 2003 to 2007 and recipient of the IPB's Sean MacBride Prize in 2007. I welcome this opportunity to renew those bonds.

We are at a tipping point in history. The interconnected threats of nuclear weapons use, climate change and increasing inequality not only imperil the fabric of global society but also the very existence of human life and the eco-system that sustains it. Increasing extremism and terrorism, conflicts triggered by regime change motives and the consequential displacement of people, the largest since World War II, with a rising tide of intolerance are other trends today. On nuclear weapons an estimated 15,850 nuclear warheads, each of them far more destructive than the US bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki 71 years ago, are held by nine countries - four thousand on hair-trigger alert ready to be launched. All nine countries are modernizing their weapons at enormous cost while the DPRK, defying the global norm against nuclear weapons testing, has just conducted its fifth and most powerful test.

Over a long period of time in the post 1945 nuclear era the pressure of public opinion helped create a tenuous taboo on the use of nuclear weapons and build a fence of treaties, bilateral and multilateral, to restrict their use and proliferation. But unlike the outright bans on biological weapons in 1972 and on chemical weapons in 1996 a ban on nuclear weapons was, and continues to be, fiercely resisted by the nuclear weapon states. The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the various nuclear weapon free zones including the ocean floor, outer space and Antarctica and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) whose entry into force is held up by 8 countries - are all achievements to be proud of. In every step of this Sisyphean struggle international public opinion was behind the successes achieved. After the end of the Cold War - thanks to epoch-making events in this city in 1989 - a smug complacency arose that the danger of nuclear war had receded. This must end and conferences like this are a reality check.

It was in the last two or three decades that we have seen an acceleration of the global campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons totally. Several independent commissions on security and disarmament beginning with the 1982 Palme Commission have made important recommendations. I was personally associated with two of them – the 1995-6 Canberra Commission and the 2003-6 Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. We also had the groundbreaking 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which the nuclear weapon states have ignored. Four major US personalities of the Cold War era – Schultz, Kissinger, Nunn and Perry - wrote the first of their Wall Street Journal op-eds in 2007 calling for a nuclear weapon free world impressing the then US Presidential candidate Barak Obama. Once elected President Obama seemed to be fulfilling the expectations that he had aroused with his April 2009 speech in Prague announcing his vision of a ‘nuclear weapon-free world’ and, despite the caveat of “not in my lifetime”, this inspired many to think of the vision as a real possibility. However, Obama disappointed nuclear disarmament supporters with his Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review and the modesty of his New START agreement with Russia the ratification of which involved a huge donation to the US nuclear weapon establishment.

Today, seven years later, we are nowhere near achieving that vision.. The failure of the Ninth Review Conference of the NPT in 2015 has led inevitably to some mutual recrimination between the nuclear-weapons states (NWS) and non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS). Many close observers of the treaty are wondering what is next. There have been few constructive proposals on how nuclear disarmament might be achieved. Instead of that we have, what I call, ‘placebo nuclear disarmament’ in the form of Nuclear Security Summits. More recently there have been carefully planted stories of a possible “No first use” declaration by the USA and on 23 September a fresh non legally binding UN Security Council Resolution supported CTBT and the de facto moratorium on nuclear weapon testing. Meanwhile the CTBT entry-into-force languishes because of eight countries including the USA. The apparent end of the Humanitarian Initiative movement and the lackluster outcome of the Open-Ended Working Group on Disarmament—on both of which civil society’s hopes had soared—leaves those in favour of nuclear disarmament dispirited and even desperate with an unpredictable US presidential election on November 8 looming large in the background. Nevertheless six nations have just this week tabled a resolution at the UN General Assembly calling for the negotiation of a nuclear weapon ban.

The pursuit of the mirage of a nuclear weapon free world suits the nuclear weapon states as they modernize their weapons and collude to block progress at the NPT Review Conferences, at the International Court of Justice and within the UN disarmament machinery. The latest statement of the P5 issued on September 15 is a repetition of past policy with no indication of any change.

As civil society we can no longer depend on Governments of nuclear possessor countries to achieve a nuclear weapon free world. I am not a pessimist. Nor am I a naïve optimist. After decades working for the cause of peace and disarmament I like to think that I am a realist. I have in my lifetime seen the end of colonialism in my own country and region; I have witnessed the civil rights movement in the USA delegitimize racial discrimination; I have seen the collapse of the evil apartheid structure in South Africa with the liberation of Nelson Mandela and his people forming an elected Government in a non-racial democracy in South Africa; I have been witness to the end of the Cold War and the tensions and rivalry between

hegemonic powers that we in the Non-aligned Movement worked so hard to resolve. Those achievements must be credited to the people of the countries involved. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and others were not Government leaders when they led their people to achieve change. Will the leaders of nuclear weapon armed states ask the people to vote in a referendum on whether their countries should reduce or de-alert weapon arsenals let alone retain or reject nuclear weapons? Will the people of Scotland have a choice over accepting the renewal by the British House of Commons of the Trident in Faslane?

And so we must go back to working for a groundswell of public opinion to get rid of the most destructive weapon invented by humankind. Here in Europe, where the last two World Wars began, there are ominous signs of a return of Cold War tensions. One US Congressional Research Service report says, “According to unclassified reports, the United States now deploys 160-200 bombs at six bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Some of these weapons are stored at U.S. bases and would be delivered by U.S. aircraft. Others are stored at bases operated by the “host nation” and would be delivered by that nation’s aircraft if NATO decided to employ nuclear weapons.” Ballistic Missile Defence systems based in Europe ostensibly created because of an alleged Iranian threat but in fact aimed at Russia, continue despite the JCPOA agreement with Iran - to which the EU made such a significant contribution. As democracies will these European countries ask their citizens through plebiscites whether they approve of these policies? The pursuit of containment policies on China in Asia and on the Russian Federation in Europe only exacerbates tension. Gorbachev who accepted the fall of the Berlin Wall in return for NATO remaining within its then borders must be gravely disappointed as we observe the 30th anniversary of the famous Reagan-Gorbachev Summit of 1986 in Reykjavik. A few days hence I will participate in a discussion in Reykjavik on the legacy of that famous 1986 Summit which some see as the beginning of the end of the Cold War. It is an opportune moment to restore the spirit of détente and consider a deep reduction of nuclear weapons to further our advance to a nuclear weapon free world.

Non nuclear weapon states in concert with civil society groups are looking forward to the Open-ended Working Group on Disarmament bringing its outcome to the current UNGA session. The “Humanitarian Initiative”, the disinvestment campaign of “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” which NGOs like ICAN and others have conducted must go on until success is achieved. Meanwhile we hope that no use of nuclear weapons either by design or accident; by state or non-state actors takes place with the catastrophic consequences it will bring upon humanity. As long as nuclear weapons exist the simple logic is that their ownership cannot be restricted to the nine states that now possess them. Other states and non-state actors will want them. If there are no nuclear weapons there cannot be nuclear weapon proliferation to terrorists or anyone else. The Global Zero campaign put it bluntly: “There’s no such thing as ‘nuclear security’ as long as nuclear weapons exist.”

Before I conclude let me refer to another issue raised by commentators on contemporary international affairs and that is the so-called “Thucydides Trap”. In an article in the “Atlantic” in September 2015, Professor Graham Allison of Harvard’s Belfer Centre wrote—

“The defining question about global order for this generation is whether China and the United States can escape Thucydides’s Trap. The Greek historian’s metaphor reminds us of the attendant dangers when a rising power rivals a ruling power—as Athens challenged Sparta in ancient Greece, or as Germany did Britain a century ago. Most such contests have ended badly, often for both nations, a team of mine at the Harvard Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs has concluded after analyzing the historical record. In 12 of 16 cases over the past 500 years, the result was war. When the parties avoided war, it required huge, painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged. “

While international affairs experts and diplomats debate the issue, one fundamental aspect that stands out from the 16 cases referred to, is that nuclear weapons, with the single exception of the Cold War, were never a part of the equation. There is therefore no question of falling into the “Thucydides Trap” by design or accident when the contending powers are armed with weapons of mass destruction and when non-state terrorist actors seek these weapons for themselves. Solutions based on international law and negotiated through patient diplomacy, and not war, aggressive containment policies or uncompromising irredentism, are surely the lesson of history to be adopted in this nuclear age.

2017 may well be an auspicious year. We begin the new NPT Review cycle. The world will have a new US President - for better or worse. There will be a new UN Secretary-General. And the EU will, hopefully, have adjusted to the exit of the UK. Amidst all the challenges that this will entail, a fresh approach to the NPT—given its global importance as the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime - and new steps towards nuclear disarmament will be vitally important.

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