

A Safer World for All

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A verifiable global agreement on eliminating nuclear weapons would make all the world's people safer equally. Jayantha Dhanapala is a former ambassador of Sri Lanka and a former U.N. under-secretary-general for disarmament affairs. He is currently president of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.

The nuclear weapon is the most destructive instrument of violence and terror ever invented by humans. A nuclear war will not only kill millions of people, destroying entire cities, but also devastate our life-supporting ecology, inflicting genetic consequences on future generations. No nation's security justifies the retention of such a weapon, let alone its use.

In 2010, the *hibakusha*, survivors of the first and, so far, only use of nuclear weapons — by the United States in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end the Second World War in 1945 — testify graphically to their experience, including continuing radiation effects.

Today nine states with nuclear weapons — five participants in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and four nonparticipants — have 23,300 nuclear weapons, more than 8,000 of them deployed and ready to be fired within minutes. We can never be certain that they will not be used again — whether through hostile intent or careless accident, whether by a state or by a non-state terrorist group. This last possibility may be all too real. Huge stocks of highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium, the fissile material of nuclear weapons, lie around the world, all too often in deplorably insecure conditions.

Nor are the consequences of nuclear weapons use limited to death, destruction, and radiation poisoning.



Protesters rally in New York during the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

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Scientific research says that using even 0.03 percent of the global nuclear arsenal can cause catastrophic climate change.

Governments, especially Non-Aligned Movement members, and civil society groups, such as Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, have long urged a convention outlawing nuclear weapons. Opinion pieces by eminent elder statesmen have recently appeared in the United States and other countries calling for a nuclear weapons-free world.

President Barack Obama in his April 2009 Prague speech identified global elimination of nuclear weapons as a policy objective. Many governments and civil

society groups have endorsed his goals.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty and the nuclear weapon-free zones one finds mainly in the Southern Hemisphere have reduced the scale of proliferation. Yet some nations argue the NPT has failed to deliver on its promised central bargain: disarmament by the nuclear weapons states in exchange for nonproliferation by the non-nuclear weapons states.

This situation cannot be sustained indefinitely. As long as some states have nuclear weapons, others will inevitably aspire to possess them for national security, as status symbols, or for terrorist uses. Only in a world verifiably free of nuclear weapons will there be no proliferation. That will be a safer world and a better world for all — equally. ■

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