



TOWARDS (GLOBAL) ZERO NUKES

Jayantha Dhanapala presents a case for building a firm global commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons, as set out in the Global Zero Action Plan.

About 200 signatories to the declaration that the world should go down to zero nuclear weapons met last month in Paris, with supportive messages from President Barack Obama, President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and others. There is unquestionably – and long overdue, 20 years following the end of the Cold War – a revitalised global movement, both at popular and policy levels for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The Global Zero Action Plan (GZAP) is a means of deepening and widening this movement in order to achieve its implementation. But the delicate gossamer of hope is no substitute for the hard reality of achievement.

So how do we translate rhetoric into reality? And how do we build commitment?

Some of the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS), under pressure from the effects of climate change, may be driven to nuclear power through the current demand to seek non-carbon-emitting sources of energy.

This ‘nuclear renaissance’ would have no risk of nuclear-weapon proliferation, if nuclear weapons were outlawed under a system of verification.

The citizens of these countries – many of them in the developing global south, including the ‘bottom billion’ – see their economic

development and breakout from the poverty trap by means of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. They will become practical beneficiaries of nuclear-weapon abolition, freeing them from any suspicion of nuclear-weapon proliferation in accessing nuclear power.

Likewise, the spectre of nuclear terrorism will diminish with greater security over nuclear materials and technology in a nuclear-weapon-free world, especially with the cooperation that must follow Obama’s initiative in holding a Washington Nuclear Security Summit next month.

The Action Plan consists of four phases over a time span of 20 years. And it has rightly been pointed out that bilateral US-Russian nuclear-arms agreements also took several years to negotiate. Multilateral agreements too, like the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, took several years to be negotiated at the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament.

The credibility of a process lies not so much in the period of time it takes, but in the goal and sincere commitment of the parties in the negotiation to this goal.

That is why a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), aimed at outlawing the only category of weapons of mass destruction that has not been abolished, must be the framework for GZAP. If nations embark on the negotiation of a NWC now, either at the Conference on Disarmament or at a special diplomatic conference, and ensure that the national security interests of all nations (both nuclear weapon and non-nuclear weapon) are safeguarded equally in a nuclear-weapon-free world, we would be more likely to win global commitment to the process.

NWC, as an achievable objective, is already gaining a groundswell of grass-root support around the world. The UN Secretary-General has made it a part of his five-point nuclear-disarmament plan, and several governments and NGOs in civil society have endorsed it as a goal. There has to be a merging of GZAP and NWC to build international commitment. That is what I am proposing here.

Already, at last month’s Paris Summit, the participation of youth was significant. One of them described his



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generation as the first for whom nuclear weapons belonged to the past. A global campaign using Lawrence Bender's remarkable film *Countdown to Zero* – which ran at the summit – and other educational and visual aids is planned.

Disarmament education is an important process to achieve this task. The UN already has a programme and if more resources are devoted to this, we will see a campaign to make GZAP gather more support.

The trade-off between global military expenditure and economic development is more compelling as an argument at a time when the world is struggling to recover from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

In aggregate terms, the world spends US\$ 1,464 billion on military expenditure in one year, with the US accounting for 41.5 per cent of this spend. This translates into 217 dollars for each person a year, in a world where one billion live on less than US\$ 1.25 a day, where one in six fellow human beings go hungry every day, and where a child dies every six seconds because of malnutrition.

An estimated US\$ 90 billion is spent on its nuclear-weapons programme and US Vice President Joe Biden still wants to spend 600 million dollars more on maintaining a credible nuclear-weapon stockpile.

Meanwhile, The World Bank estimates that it will cost 40 to 60 billion dollars to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

We have specific occasions to ensure a commitment to Global Zero. There is the Washington Nuclear Security Summit in April; and in May, the NPT Review Conference takes place in New York. The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and the First Committee of the UN General Assembly are also logical forums for GZAP to receive a commitment from governments.

The Nuclear Posture Review of the US and the nuclear doctrines of other nuclear-weapon states and NATO must reflect a commitment to Global Zero by de-emphasising the role of nuclear weapons in their defence strategies, and adopting a road map to nuclear-weapon elimination to which a commitment was already made at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs – built in 1957, on the foundation of the Einstein-Russell Manifesto – has campaigned for a nuclear-weapon-free world for several decades.

Others have also fought long and hard for the same goal. Now is the time for all forces to join together. In Milan last month, Pugwash adopted a document that contained important steps to mobilise an international commitment to Global Zero.

Phased programmes have an inbuilt danger of converting their goals into mirages. The use of phrases like 'the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons' is no way to gain commitment. The goal must be seen to be immediate and real. We cannot also achieve this goal by spending more money on nuclear weapons in order to have a credible deterrent, while calling at the same time for zero nukes.

This is actually 'anti-nuclear nuclearism' – the doublespeak that has dominated the nuclear disarmament dialogue for decades.

Let us make a clean break from that by being sincere in our commitment and action.

As Secretary Shultz reminded the Paris Summit audience, we missed a glorious opportunity to achieve Global Zero at Reykjavik in 1986. Richard Rhodes has immortalised that moment in history in his new play, *Reykjavik*. Let us not lose the fresh opportunity we now have almost a quarter of a century later.

The achievement of Global Zero is too important to sacrifice at the altar of domestic politics, whether this be in the US or anywhere else.