# Remarks at the Opening Plenary:

***What does it mean to advance the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons?***

**By**

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## Achieving the Vision of a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

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Before I proceed with my brief remarks today, allow me to convey my respects to the Government of Norway, both for hosting this event and for its long-standing support for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I also salute the authors of the Hoover Plan for their efforts to elaborate specific steps to fulfil their vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Nobody believes that the road ahead will be easy to travel. Though the Plan has received an outpouring of support around the world, it has also attracted a few critical commentaries, typically invoking the old claims that nuclear disarmament is a utopian or even dangerous goal to pursue. Most of these criticisms, however, fail to consider the concrete benefits of nuclear disarmament and the various measures that make it possible. The critics also exaggerate the risks of disarmament and fail to compare such risks against the obvious dangers of trying to rely exclusively on non-proliferation and counter-terrorism measures to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

My purpose today, however, is not to refute ill-founded criticisms, but to consider a more positive agenda – namely, some specific actions to advance <u>global</u> <u>nuclear</u> <u>disarmament</u>. The first word here is "global", which underscores the universal scope of this historic project. I must note in this context that the world has not agreed just to keep nuclear weapons from "falling into the wrong hands", to use the cliché. For over 60 years, UN Member States have instead endorsed the goal of pursuing a world in which nuclear weapons are in no one's hands. I know of no State that does not support this worthy goal.

Of course, the word "global" also applies to the standards or yardsticks used to assess progress in this field. In my remarks last year at Stanford, I discussed several such criteria, including binding commitments, irreversibility, transparency, and verification. Many of these were endorsed at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, and incorporated into the thirteen steps for nuclear disarmament agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

These standards have also been echoed in numerous General Assembly resolutions over the years, and have been embodied in several treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones. They are increasingly part of the international "rule of law" for disarmament and deserve international respect. Essentially, these standards offer indispensable tools for ensuring that deep reductions of nuclear weapons are in fact occurring, and that the weapons are actually being eliminated, not temporarily removed from deployment, or sequestered in hidden stockpiles.

This brings me to the term "nuclear disarmament", which encompasses the goals of outlawing the manufacture and the possession of nuclear weapons, as well as the process to achieve such goals. Disarmament clearly involves a lot more than just improving physical security of nuclear arsenals, and tightening non-proliferation and counter-terrorism controls, however worthwhile such initiatives might be in addressing their specific concerns. Nuclear disarmament is also much more than an "ultimate goal", a term the international community reserves for "general and complete disarmament", an even bolder vision that encompasses both the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the limitation of conventional arms. In our world today, nuclear disarmament is widely viewed as a far more urgent priority than an "ultimate goal".

This perspective is good news for the architects of the Hoover Plan – it offers a solid foundation upon which to build. So far, the Plan has affirmed the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world and has also identified a wide range of policy initiatives that are focused on improving the physical security of nuclear weapons and related materials, arms control measures, deeper reductions in nuclear forces or deployments, non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism measures.

Some of these initiatives appear among the 2000 NPT Review Conference's thirteen steps for nuclear disarmament. Some appear in General Assembly resolutions. And some appear in recommendations of other

distinguished bodies, like the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission chaired by Hans Blix. They all enjoy substantial international support, yet many still await action.

The time has now come, therefore, to explore some additional initiatives to advance the specific goal of nuclear disarmament *per se*. One way to proceed is to elaborate measures to implement the four standards that the international community has already agreed should guide disarmament efforts. I would like to offer a few today for your consideration.

**First – binding commitments.** The future of global nuclear disarmament will require much more than unilateral actions or non-binding agreements. Given the sensitivity of their perceived national security interests, States that possess nuclear weapons would not likely give them up in exchange for informal understandings, political assurances, vague promises, or toasts. They would instead want the commitments registered in the most binding form possible. Together, these binding commitments constitute the "rule of law" for disarmament. Relevant measures in this area would include some sign that the states possessing nuclear weapons are at least considering, individually or collectively, the outlines of what a "nuclear-weapons convention" would have to contain. The lack of evidence of any such consideration only gives rise to new doubts about the seriousness of the commitments of these States to disarmament. It is in no way premature for States possessing nuclear weapons to *discuss* the feasibility and merits of such a convention. One early indicator of real progress in disarmament will come when the Conference on Disarmament is able to commence negotiations – or even discussions – on a nuclear-weapons convention.

**Second – irreversibility** is another vital criterion for disarmament. It is in part advanced by means of binding commitments, but goes somewhat further in requiring concrete measures to ensure that States will not one day decide to abandon or "cheat" on their disarmament commitments. The harder it is for States to reverse a disarmament decision, the greater will be the confidence of the international community in the security benefits of disarmament. There are numerous ways to slow down or discourage the process of reversing a disarmament commitment, or to make such reversals easier to detect. There are various legal constraints on reversibility, such as disallowing a withdrawal from a disarmament treaty, or establishing an elaborate multi-stage process for making such a withdrawal effective. Negotiation of a fissile-material treaty – an initiative that continues to have strong support in the Conference on Disarmament – would be a step in the right direction, as would a universal commitment by all States not to produce weapons-usable fissile material under any circumstances. Other controls on delivery vehicles – a goal already found in the preamble of the NPT – could also help to discourage any serious consideration of reversing a disarmament commitment.

**Third – transparency**. The current problem of nuclear opacity is best illustrated by one simple fact: nobody seems to know for sure how many nuclear weapons exist in the world, with the most common estimate being in the vicinity of 26,000. Various non-governmental organizations have made valiant efforts to nail down a precise figure, but progress here has been slow. Over the years, Canada and Germany, among others, have proposed various instruments to enhance transparency – including "registers" for nuclear weapons and fissile materials. Data on nuclear weapons holdings should also include both deployed and un-deployed weapons as well as delivery vehicles. Such progress in enhancing transparency would also help, at least somewhat, in balancing the ever-increasing transparency being demanded of non-nuclear-weapon states. Transparency improvements are a powerful confidence-builder with respect to both non-proliferation and disarmament.

**The fourth criterion is verification.** It is scarcely imaginable that the world will ever achieve nuclear disarmament without a robust system of verification to confirm and assure compliance. While declared reductions in deployments of strategic weapons – as provided in the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty – are welcome, the need for verification can only grow over time, especially if reductions apply not only to deployed weapons but to the

total nuclear stockpiles. Verification is in this sense not an obstacle to disarmament but an enabler. The United Kingdom has done some pioneering work in investigating how to verify nuclear disarmament, and its recent proposal in Geneva for a technical conference offers the prospect of further enhancing this capability.

In addressing these various proposals, I recognize that the initiative for many of them must come from the states possessing the largest nuclear arsenals, largely as a result of bilateral negotiations. I hope that in addition to their own internal deliberations, they will consult with other states that also possess such weapons to develop some additional ideas on next steps for nuclear disarmament. These consultations should also include NPT non-nuclear-weapon states who, after all, share the duty of pursuing global nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the Treaty.

As I look ahead, while I see many obstacles, I also see the dedicated efforts of those who continue to demand substantial progress in this field. I am referring here not just to the individuals involved in the Hoover Plan, but to people throughout civil society who understand the importance of pursuing global nuclear disarmament. Needless to say, I am also referring to the Government of Norway and other enlightened Governments around the world that support this goal.

Having a clear strategic vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world is a good start, but there comes a time to identify some specific political tactics to fulfil that vision. In November 2006, the distinguished participants at the 7th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates issued their Rome Declaration, which warned of the "lack of political will" to achieve this goal. I strongly believe that progress in meeting the four key multilateral standards I have addressed would help in alleviating many of the concerns of critics of disarmament, and would thereby help in addressing this problem of political will. Any effective strategy to strengthen this political will would no doubt also require some significant engagement and coalition-building among diverse groups in government and civil society. I have in mind here legislators, mayors, the media, academia, religious leaders, a multitude of public interest organizations, and former government and military officials – to name only a few.

We would do well to recall that the Rome Declaration also referred to nuclear weapons as "*more of a problem than any problem they seek to solve. In the hands of anyone, the weapons themselves remain an unacceptable, morally reprehensible, impractical and dangerous risk.*"

How fitting it is for us to meet today, in the country that established the Nobel Peace Prize, to consider next steps toward a nuclear-weapon-free world. How fitting it is to have amongst us former nuclear-weapon policy makers who have made their own commitments to this goal. And how fitting it would indeed be if, today, we could together identify ways and means to achieve and strengthen global security without nuclear weapons. This can be done. This must be done. I am confident that this will be done.