

Closing Keynote Address

Disarmament and Political Will

By

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**PUGWASH, PARLIAMENTARIANS AND POLITICAL WILL:
ADVANCING THE AGENDA FOR ABOLITION**

**Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament
International Conference and Council Meeting**

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Being the last speaker at a three-day conference has its risks, but it also has the definite benefit of giving me the last word. In this case, that word is, congratulations. I wish to thank the organizers from Pugwash Peace Exchange and the Middle Powers Initiative for an exceptionally well-organized and thought-provoking event. Senator Douglas Roche and Jonathan Granoff deserve specific praise. I also commend all the speakers—not just for their prepared statements, but their many professional *deeds* in advancing what this conference has called the “agenda for abolition.”

As one who has worked on disarmament and non-proliferation issues for several decades, I take great comfort in seeing such a high level of interest and expertise among all participants. While it is true that we may not have solved all the problems that will be encountered on the road to global nuclear disarmament, I believe we are more convinced than ever of the importance of this historic journey and of achieving its final destination.

We must not, however, be so preoccupied with contemporary circumstances and future tasks that we forget the road behind us. In the first 12 days of this month, for example, historians marked the following anniversaries –

- The Russell-Einstein Manifesto in 1955
- The first Pugwash meeting in 1957
- The NPT’s opening for signature in 1968
- The signing of Threshold Test Ban Treaty in 1974
- The sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985
- South Africa’s entry into the NPT in 1991
- The US announcement that it had completed the worldwide withdrawal of its ground- and sea-launched tactical nuclear weapons, and that it had withdrawn its nuclear weapons from the Republic of Korea, both in 1992
- The ICJ Advisory Opinion on nuclear weapons in 1996

Later this month, there will be some additional anniversaries, including:

- The world’s first nuclear test—Trinity—in 1945
- Entry into force of the IAEA Statute in 1957
- Signature of the START I treaty in 1991
- The US announcement that it had halted the production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons in 1992
- The last Chinese nuclear test in 1996

- The United Kingdom's announcement in 1998 that it was reducing its nuclear arsenal to less than 200 warheads.

These various anniversaries just in the month of July indicate clearly that the road ahead will likely be much like the road behind—with many twists and turns, some detours, an occasional cul-de-sac, and even a few moments on the expressway. Our journey ahead will not have the benefit of any cruise-controls, automatic pilots, or GPS navigation systems. Plans, maps, compasses, and yardsticks will of course be needed, but so will some clever improvisation. Some attention must also be paid to both geography and meteorology.

Yet it is the fuel to propel us along this journey that I wish to address this evening—that source of energy which allows for movement past agreed milestones. This fuel, of course, is *political will*.

Let me first explain what I mean by this difficult term. In a statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly in October 2006, the Director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Patricia Lewis, defined political will as, “the sustained determination to advance a public interest, even in the face of strong resistance.”¹ She stressed that the problem of political will lies not so much in its existence, as in the direction it is heading.

This is a very important point—for we have today a multitude of states that have strong political will to achieve their own specific goals. The problem appears to be some lack of agreement on these goals. Thus we find ourselves today not in the position of drivers on an expressway to disarmament, but as rowers in a Roman galleon whose seats are placed in opposite directions. Individually, we diligently slave away at our individual tasks, only to find that our collective efforts are leaving us all right where we started. We are burning calories, not nuclear weapons.

As the UN's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, my goal and indeed my role is not simply to row harder, but to find some ways to adjust the seats so that all of our collective labours are directed to the same objective. I believe that there is in the world today perhaps a greater understanding than ever of the need for multilateral cooperation in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons or their acquisition by terrorists. Yet while progress in these areas is obviously necessary, it is not alone sufficient to lead us all to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, I believe that an obsessive and exclusive focus only on those goals would not only take us off the road to global nuclear disarmament, but also lead us into uncharted terrain.

¹ <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com06/statements/UNIDIRoct18.doc>

Fortunately, from several recent statements and articles we can see that more and more responsible people and their leaders around the world are slowly coming to understand how genuine progress in disarmament will help in alleviating the dangers of nuclear proliferation and terrorism, and how progress in all these areas is urgently needed. So the basic challenge is not just to stimulate or inspire political will, but to give it some direction—the *right* direction. We need to row together toward our common destination.

Now my staff and I obviously cannot solve this problem from our comfortable offices on the 31st floor of the UN Secretariat. Yet the various institutional arenas of the UN system can still do many positive things to promote cooperation among its Member States. The Disarmament Commission can develop common guidelines to assist in the achievement of disarmament goals. The General Assembly's First Committee can redouble its efforts to build a political consensus on nuclear disarmament resolutions that have in the past attracted significant negative votes or abstentions. The Conference on Disarmament can at long last commence discussions or, preferably, negotiations on multilateral treaties in such fields as nuclear disarmament, fissile material, nuclear security assurances, and preventing an arms race in outer space. The Secretariat is actively working with individuals and groups in civil society to promote disarmament—we organize meetings, workshops, and seminars around the world; we publish reports and studies; we are trying advance this goal in the schools; and we work regularly with Member States that understand that disarmament is one of the best and most reliable means of pursuing international peace and security.

Yes, the UN can do many things. But it cannot replace or compete with the vital need for concrete action at the level of state policy and practice, which is shaped and influenced in diverse ways by an informed public.

I believe the problem of political will can be transformed into common purpose, and that this is possible as a result of activities at many political levels. First, enlightened leadership by states possessing nuclear weapons, including both a public recognition of a formal responsibility to eliminate such weapons, and a commitment to take specific actions to achieve this goal—actions that include the development of operational plans, with budgets, national institutions, laws, and timetables for implementing them. It is nice to hear favourable words about disarmament, often framed in the rhetoric of a vision or dream, but the time has surely come for concrete achievements. And by achievements, I do not mean simple declarations, but progress that is verifiable, transparent, irreversible, and that is undertaken in the fulfilment of binding legal obligations.

Prospects for inspiring and strengthening this type of leadership will improve to the extent that other states throughout the world community—what might be called the second tier of

political will—also raise the issue of disarmament as high among their own national priorities. National leaders can raise the issue publicly—I view the annual plenary sessions of the UN General Assembly as an ideal place for such statements—or in private bilateral discussions with states that possess such weapons. They can work with like-minded states and form broad-based political coalitions, following the positive models set by the New Agenda Coalition and the seven-nation Norwegian Initiative. They can fund research, create disarmament internships for young students, and work in partnership with groups in civil society on a wide array of useful projects to advance the cause of disarmament. Their options for action are essentially limitless.

A third tier of political will actually exists between the first two, for it applies to all countries—this is the tier occupied by the legislatures. I believe they do indeed form a collective identity, given the similar functions they play in virtually all countries. They appropriate funds, hold officials accountable, debate policy, undertake investigations, ratify treaties, adopt implementing legislation, represent voices of public opinion, and some also work with legislatures in other countries, either directly or indirectly through organizations like the Inter-Parliamentary Union, or the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament.

Speaking in Delhi last month, I pointed out how the Six-Nation Initiative launched by Olof Palme, Indira Gandhi and others came about as a result of work of a group then called, “Parliamentarians for World Order,” headed by Senator Douglas Roche. Another distinguished participant at our conference today is Jayantha Dhanapala, who—while serving as the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs—also understood well the important role of parliaments in disarmament. In a speech at the British House of Commons in July 2000, he stated that parliaments “help to give disarmament not only vision, but also some backbone, muscle, and teeth.”

I would also like to mention that nuclear disarmament was addressed in the unanimous Declarations issued after the World Conferences that were held at the United Nations in 2000 and 2005 involving the presiding officers of national parliaments. Parliaments can also cooperate on a regional basis to promote disarmament, with the European Parliament providing an excellent example.

If legislators are a potential political constituency for disarmament, so are the world’s mayors. Let us recall that according to the UN Population Fund, 2008 was the first year that the world’s population became primarily urban—fully 3.3 billion people now live in cities. If nuclear weapons are ever again used, it is likely they would be used on cities, which would bear the heaviest burdens not only of any such attack but also its horrific aftermath.

Spearheaded largely by Mayor Akiba of Hiroshima, the Mayors for Peace initiative has gained 40 new members this year, bringing its membership to representatives of over 2,300 cities.

Big powers, middle powers, legislators and mayors all have their important contributions to make in achieving global nuclear disarmament, but all can benefit from the activities of countless individuals and groups in civil society—a sector that former Secretary-General Kofi Annan used to call the “new superpower.” Disarmament is, after all, a global public good, a term often used by our current Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon—its benefits do not flow to any specific group or person, but are shared by entire communities. Not surprisingly, disarmament has attracted the interest of environmentalists, human rights activists, religious leaders, lawyers, engineers, scientists, educators, journalists, and countless other organized groupings and professions.

One of the persistent handicaps facing such groups has been the lack of sufficient funding, but this too may be changing, as disarmament rises on the public agenda. The recent op-eds by George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn have had a significant impact in stimulating public interest, as have similar statements by other distinguished former leaders and high officials. As public interest grows, I believe that private foundations will increasingly come to recognize that this is a public policy issue that really should be supported. If political will is what fuels the disarmament process, the private foundations have their own important role to play in helping to pay some of the fuel bills. I view such support not as charity, but as an investment in a safer and more secure world, even a civic duty.

I would like to conclude by expressing my deep appreciation to the entire Pugwash organization for all it has done, over so many years, on behalf of disarmament and international peace and security. Your agenda parallels the goals of the United Nations in eliminating weapons of mass destruction, regulating conventional arms, opposing the use of military force to resolve political disputes, and promoting human welfare. Your work in promoting exchanges between scientists is more important than ever, given the enormous complexity of modern technologies and their many risks and opportunities for people throughout the world. I salute what you have done in educating the public through your various publications, workshops, and symposia and believe that, all together, these activities have made their own important contribution to the political will to pursue enlightened policies.

I thank you for inviting me to participate in this conference and wish you all the very best in all your work.