

# Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

by

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## *Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons*

Conference Commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan

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I wish to begin by thanking the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and the Indian Council for World Affairs for organizing this event and for inviting me to participate. I share the view that the Action Plan introduced by India in 1988 deserves to be remembered, both for its wisdom, and for the abiding relevance of its powerful vision of a path toward a safer and more peaceful world. It is not surprising that such a vision would emerge from a land the world has long associated with the non-violent ideals of the Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi.

In my invitation, the organizers said that the aim of this conference is to “spur dialogue on nuclear disarmament as a strategic necessity of our times.” After witnessing many years of setbacks in this field, I have come to the conclusion that the world has, at long last, reached a point where such a dialogue can finally take place productively and in good faith. Any optimism in this regard must of course be tempered by a sober recognition of the work that lies ahead to overcome many persisting obstacles.

In introducing his Action Plan to the UN General Assembly on 9 June 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had a lot to say about nuclear deterrence. He called it the “ultimate expression of the philosophy of terrorism”—a doctrine that, in his words, “will take us like lemmings to our own suicide.” Over the years, he was of course not the only one to have made this connection between nuclear deterrence and terrorism. The 2006 report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by Hans Blix, bears the title, “Weapons of Terror.”

Yet today, as we mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Action Plan, we have not five but about eight or nine states that possess nuclear weapons and that adhere to some version of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. While this number is still small—surely relative to the over 180 states that have chosen not to acquire such weapons—it is troubling indeed that over half of the world’s population now lives in states that are armed with nuclear weapons or are covered by nuclear umbrellas.

This year also brings the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Its obligations included a legal commitment “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” Though nobody knows exactly how many nuclear weapons exist, the number is often estimated around 26,000. We are surely well past the NPT’s “early date” for negotiations on nuclear disarmament and the world is still struggling to confront three nuclear threats—those associated with existing arsenals, the prospect of the proliferation of such weapons to additional states, and the danger of their acquisition by terrorists.

Can the Action Plan—which was reportedly soon followed by India’s decision to acquire such weapons—still inspire constructive multilateral initiatives for global nuclear disarmament? Yes I believe it can, especially if viewed in its historical context.

The world knows that India has long advocated the elimination of nuclear weapons and still does so today along with other disarmament goals. I am very pleased that the UN’s Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific will open next month its office in Kathmandu, an event that has long been promoted by India—and the Centre will both need and welcome its support in the years ahead.

India's efforts for nuclear disarmament have in fact spanned several decades. Mahatma Gandhi himself condemned the atomic bombings in Japan, declaring that "The only weapon that can save the world is non-violence." On April 2, 1954, Prime Minister Nehru responded to tests of hydrogen bombs by calling upon the United States and the Soviet Union to conclude a "standstill agreement" on further tests pending progress in disarmament. India presented this proposal to Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld a few days later and has ever since been a persistent advocate in the UN of nuclear disarmament, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, which I hope will soon enter into force.

India's interest in "general and complete disarmament" is also important to note in this context. Due to mandates derived from the Charter and early General Assembly resolutions, the UN has simultaneously pursued the *elimination* of all weapons of mass destruction and the *regulation* of conventional armaments. In 1959, the General Assembly adopted a Soviet resolution that combined these into the concept of "general and complete disarmament under effective international control." The Soviet plan offered a three-stage approach to disarmament, to be implemented in 4 years—the United Kingdom had also issued a three-stage approach to disarmament in September of that year. In 1961, the United States and the Soviet Union announced agreement on a Joint Statement of Agreed Principles for a treaty on general and complete disarmament that would be achieved "in an agreed sequence, by stages."

Later that year, the General Assembly created the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (or ENDC), a negotiating body that included India as a new member, and that proceeded to consider treaty proposals offered by the United States and Soviet Union. Each of these proposals included a three-stage approach to achieving general and complete disarmament. In those deliberations, India proposed a draft preamble to such a treaty, which included several goals that were closely aligned with the Charter—including the peaceful resolution of disputes and an agreement to renounce war as an instrument of policy. I am noting these developments because both the three-stage approach and the renunciation of war later figured prominently in the 1988 Action Plan.

Throughout the decade of the 1960s, India contributed actively to deliberations in the ENDC—I personally witnessed these contributions as a junior member of the Brazilian delegation to the Committee. I recall how the negotiating priorities shifted in the mid-1960s from an emphasis on pursuing a treaty on general and complete disarmament, to what were then called "partial measures," which included the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests.

In this period, India joined what was known as the "group of eight"—a small but diverse group of states on the Committee sharing common views on disarmament issues. This group issued a series of Joint Memoranda describing such views in some detail. One such memorandum, dated 15 September 1965, stated that a "treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is not an end in itself but only a means to an end"—namely, the achievement of nuclear disarmament. Throughout these years, India's representative in the ENDC argued that a true non-proliferation treaty must cover both the improvement or expansion of existing arsenals (that is, vertical proliferation) and the spread of such weapons to additional states. That view was actively supported by the other members of the group of eight.

On 19 November 1965, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 2028, which called on the ENDC to negotiate a nuclear non-proliferation treaty that embodied five principles—it should be void of any loop-holes; it should "embody an acceptable balance of mutual responsibilities and obligations"; it should be a step toward general and complete disarmament; it should contain provisions to ensure the

effectiveness of the treaty; and it should not interfere with the right of states to pursue regional nuclear-weapon-free zones.

India later objected that the text of the NPT did not satisfy these criteria because of the different obligations of the nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states. India argued that the former should stop manufacturing such weapons, as the latter commit not to acquire them. India also claimed that the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy should extend to the right of non-nuclear-weapon states to conduct nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes. At the ENDC in 1966, India's ambassador declared that "The so-called balance of terror seems to produce only terror but no balance, and provides proliferation but no stable security."

On 23 May 1967, India elaborated its views in the ENDC on the concept of a non-proliferation treaty, saying that such a treaty "can be a purposeful instrument only if this negotiating Committee of ours conceives of that measure in the over-all and universal concept of disarmament and not as a simple exercise in imposed non-armament of unarmed countries." The same statement regretted that "no real or effective effort is being made to deny prestige to possession of nuclear weapons." Despite such concerns, the NPT was later opened for signature on 1 July 1968. Though I have recalled today several Indian statements, I must add that similar concerns were voiced by the other members of the group of eight.

By the late 1970s—especially after India detonated its "peaceful nuclear device" in 1974—growing international concerns about the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation, expanding nuclear arsenals, and a deterioration of relations between the two Superpowers, inspired new approaches—both from governments and civil society—to re-vitalize disarmament efforts. These concerns culminated in the General Assembly's first special session on disarmament in 1978, which adopted a detailed international disarmament strategy covering both goals and the institutions needed to achieve them—which are together known as the UN disarmament machinery.

Global demands for progress in disarmament were clearly growing in those years. In 1980, Sweden established the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues under former Prime Minister Olof Palme, with India's Ambassador C.B. Muthamma as one of its members. Its final report was issued on 1 June 1982, which identified several short-term and medium-term measures to advance general and complete disarmament, covering weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms, and various measures to strengthen the UN and to advance the common theme of "common security." Two weeks later, an estimated one million people participated in a march in New York City for global nuclear disarmament.

In May 1984, Palme joined with several other heads of state and government—including India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi—to launch the "Six-Nation Initiative," an idea promoted by an international network then called "Parliamentarians for World Order." I am pleased to recognize Senator Douglas Roche of Canada—the first International President of this group—who is attending our conference today. This coalition of middle-power countries began many years of efforts to promote progress in nuclear disarmament, achieve a comprehensive nuclear test ban, and advance other goals relating to general and complete disarmament. Its efforts focused on promoting détente among the nuclear-weapon states—recognizing that the responsibility to avert a global nuclear catastrophe did not rest with such states alone.

Rajiv Gandhi succeeded his mother as a member of the Six-Nation Initiative following her assassination in October 1984; he also served as a member of the Palme Commission, which continued to monitor disarmament issues in the 1980s after publication of its report.

The Six-Nation leaders issued several joint declarations in this period to advance their goals. The Delhi Declaration of 28 January 1985 focused on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and the need for a nuclear test ban. It concluded that “Progress in disarmament can only be achieved with an informed public applying strong pressure on Governments.”

On 19 January 1986, the Palme Commission met in India and issued a Delhi Statement, which reiterated the need for action on many of the goals of its 1982 report, including nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, the nuclear test ban, outlawing space weapons, limiting conventional arms, strengthening the UN, and promoting regional security.

Shortly before his own assassination, Olof Palme and the other Six-Nation leaders issued a joint message of 28 February 1986 to Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev, calling for a moratorium on nuclear tests. A nuclear test ban was also stressed in the Mexico Declaration of 7 August 1986 by the Six-Nation leaders. On 27 November 1986, Rajiv Gandhi and President Gorbachev signed a Joint Declaration of Principles of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free and Non-Violent World, echoing many of the themes relating to general and complete disarmament, including a proposal for the elimination of nuclear weapons “before the end of the century” and for the progress toward a “nuclear-weapon free civilization.”

Therefore, by the time Rajiv Gandhi launched his Action Plan in the General Assembly, many of its components had already gained widespread recognition and support throughout the world. While the plan emphasized global nuclear disarmament, it also had several broader objectives that together, in Rajiv’s words, constituted “ideas for the conduct of international relations in a world free of nuclear weapons.”

The plan proposed the elimination of nuclear weapons in a three-stage process that was to conclude no later than the year 2010, by means of a nuclear-weapons treaty to replace the NPT. Under the plan, states would have to make tangible progress in achieving the goals of one stage before proceeding to the next. All states must be part of the disarmament process, which would also aim at establishing a broader “Comprehensive Global Security System” involving doctrines, policies, and institutions to sustain a world free of nuclear weapons. The plan identified goals for deep reductions in nuclear arsenals, a cut-off in the production of fissile material for weapons, a test ban, a prohibition on the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, and for the establishment of “an integrated multilateral verification system under the aegis of the United Nations.”

The plan did not stop with nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. It called for treaties banning chemical and radiological weapons, limitations in conventional forces, a moratorium and ban on space weapons, measures to prevent the development of weapons based on new technologies, and a shift of resources out of armaments into economic development.

In light of the history I have covered, it is clear that this Action Plan is very much consistent with over six decades of work both inside and outside the United Nations to advance the internationally agreed goal of general and complete disarmament. It most notably applies to the aim of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction and the limitation of conventional armaments. Yet it goes somewhat further by calling for

various measures to strengthen the parts of the Charter dealing with the peaceful resolution of disputes and the avoidance of threats of the use of force. It offers some specific ideas on institutional development, notably the proposal for a role for the UN in the field of verification.

It is of course possible to update this Action Plan—I note, for example, that some of its measures have already been achieved, like the Chemical Weapon Convention and the conclusion of negotiations on a CTBT. Yet what I find most striking is how many of the initiatives in this plan remain relevant today. In fact, if the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva were to finally be able to proceed to negotiate a treaty on general and complete disarmament, it would almost certainly have to cover many if not most of these initiatives. How could such a treaty, for example, neglect the disposition of fissile material, delivery systems, or the sequencing of deep cuts in nuclear arsenals?

Let us recall that both the General Assembly and the states parties to the NPT have repeatedly identified specific criteria that must apply to future efforts in the field of nuclear disarmament—criteria including verification, transparency, irreversibility, and the need to move forward through binding legal commitments. It seems to me that these are precisely the type of criteria that were proposed in the 1988 Action Plan. I also find that the plan is fully consistent with the common sense approach adopted for decades in the pursuit of general and complete disarmament—namely, that both nuclear disarmament and conventional arms limitations should be pursued simultaneously, just as the goals of disarmament and non-proliferation must also be advanced together rather than sequentially.

The true goal of general and complete disarmament is not disarmament itself, but the enhanced security of all states. Here is how the General Assembly framed this goal at its first special session on disarmament in 1978, in language that remains widely accepted today:

*Together with negotiations on nuclear disarmament measures, negotiations should be carried out on the balanced reduction of armed forces and of conventional armaments, based on the principle of undiminished security of the parties with a view to promoting or enhancing stability at a lower military level, taking into account the need of all States to protect their security.*

This language corresponds well with the basic approach articulated in the 1988 Action Plan.

Our work today should, however, not be limited to the act of retrospection. The 1988 Action Plan identified several worthy goals for the world community to pursue. It did not, however, provide much guidance on the specific means that would be needed to achieve them. What, for example, is needed to raise the priority of disarmament in key states and to break the stalemate at the CD in Geneva? The answers will of course vary with the different political and technological circumstances among the various states. Despite this diversity, I believe the course ahead will depend heavily upon initiatives from civil society and concerned governments throughout the world.

As Rajiv Gandhi stated in his speech to the General Assembly in 1988, “the battle for peace, disarmament and development must be waged both within this Assembly and outside by the peoples of the world ... [adding that] The ultimate power to bring about change rests with the people.” This conclusion certainly points us in the right direction. Let us recall that a network of parliamentarians led to the Six-Nation Initiative. Today, we have the seven-nation New Agenda Coalition and the seven-nation Norwegian initiative, which are both working to advance many of the goals also found in the Action Plan. These initiatives are in turn supported by non-governmental organizations around the world. In Japan, the

Mayors for Peace initiative has gained the support of 2,277 mayors in 129 countries, to advance their own “Overall Action Plan” for peace and disarmament. In the United States, we have numerous NGOs working to advance nuclear disarmament goals, in a collective effort that has been revitalized by the publication of opinion-editorials by former US officials George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn advancing the “Hoover Plan” for global nuclear disarmament.

These are just some of the various plans and initiatives that are very much alive in the pursuit of global nuclear disarmament. They deserve our recognition and our support.

I cannot speculate on the extent that these more recent plans have been inspired by ideas from the 1988 Action Plan, but I am sure that progress in this field is cumulative. Ideas from civil society or within governments start circulating in General Assembly debates and appearing in resolutions, and are actively pursued by groups of states, networks of non-governmental groups and individuals, promoted in interesting ways, elaborated and adapted to respond to changing conditions, and advanced through a shared conviction that the cause is right and in the common interest.

As an approach to international peace and security, disarmament has always embodied a fusion of ideals and self-interest. It is not just a dream, but a practical means to achieve security—one that is far more reliable than its alternatives, including nuclear deterrence, the balance of power, or self help. Much has been written about how nuclear weapons have been pursued for reasons of security and prestige. I believe we are now entering an age in which nations begin to realize that the same goals are served not by the acquisition, but by the elimination of such weapons, and served far better. Nuclear disarmament unites what is *right* with what *works*. This is why it has become, in the language of this conference, a “strategic necessity.”

As a former pilot, perhaps Rajiv Gandhi had flown over too many countries without witnessing any walls or barbed-wire fences. Perhaps he saw the globe as a whole, a place where people of all nationalities share some common values, common purposes, and common interests. Though most of us are not pilots or astronauts, we too can understand the extent that the interests of individual states are a function of the collective interest and welfare of the community of states, or more precisely, the peoples of the world. I believe this was the basic concept that inspired the 1988 Action Plan. It is an idea well worth the name of action—now, twenty years later, in 2008.

In closing, I would like to recall the words of Rikhi Jaipal, who served as the Secretary—and the Secretary-General’s Personal Representative—to the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva in the early 1980s, during my second tour of duty there with the Brazilian mission. In his 1986 book, Nuclear Arms and the Human Race, he warned that:

*... the danger of nuclear war will remain with us as long as there are people who think that the nuclear weapon cannot be disinvented. They should be aware that the human race cannot be re-invented after a nuclear holocaust.*

His words are an eloquent reminder that the key to future progress in disarmament remains in the realm of reshaping human perceptions—including perceptions of the inherent dangers in possessing such weapons, perceptions of their risk of use, and perceptions of the concrete security benefits that would flow from their global elimination. These perceptions will help us to navigate the road leading to a world free of nuclear weapons. Let us today recommit ourselves to achieving this great and historic goal.