

# **Achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world: How parliaments can help**

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A world without nuclear weapons: what a great achievement that would be. And this is no fanciful “utopia.” It is a goal that is finally getting serious attention across the globe and at high levels. This is more, much more, than just a noble “ultimate” goal, but a historic process. At long last, the world may well be starting to take its first tentative steps across the great bridge between disarmament words and disarmament deeds.

The United Nations, of course, has been pursuing this goal throughout its existence, given its specific mandates in the Charter, which the General Assembly elaborated in its first resolution in 1946 to include the goal of eliminating all “weapons adaptable to mass destruction.” Today, 189 States have acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which includes nuclear disarmament amongst its goals. Even recognizing the difficulties ahead, the global norms of disarmament and non-proliferation continue to enjoy widespread support throughout the world.

The outpouring of support for progress in nuclear disarmament has come from a surprisingly wide variety of sources, both governmental and non-governmental. Four former US statesmen—George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn—did a great service by authoring op-eds in the Wall Street Journal in 2007 and 2008 on this issue. We have seen similar op-eds by other distinguished quartets in Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. We have seen detailed proposals from the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission chaired by Hans Blix, and are awaiting the recommendations of the new International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, established by Australia and Japan. Additional disarmament initiatives have long been introduced in UN General Assembly resolutions.

These, of course, are only a few of such initiatives. Noting that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has “proven to be contagious,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon outlined his own five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament in a major speech last October before the EastWest Institute. In brief, he called for the following:

1. All NPT States Parties, especially the nuclear-weapon states, should fulfill their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on disarmament, whether focused on a single convention or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments.

He also called for deep reductions in the nuclear arsenals of the Russian Federation and the United States, who hold the most such weapons.

2. The Security Council's permanent members should commence discussions on security issues in the nuclear disarmament process. They could unambiguously assure non nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of such weapons. They could also consider convening a summit just on nuclear disarmament, a subject the Council has not addressed in many years.

3. The world needs to strengthen the "rule of law" in disarmament. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty should enter into force soon. Multilateral negotiations should commence on a fissile material treaty. The nuclear-weapon States should adhere to the protocols to the various regional nuclear-weapon zone treaties, and the establishment of such a zone in the Middle East should be actively pursued, in accordance with commitments made at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences, and long endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

4. The nuclear-weapon States should make public more information on what they are doing to implement their disarmament commitments, thereby helping to strengthen both accountability and transparency.

5. The world should pursue several complementary measures, including the elimination of other WMD, new efforts against WMD terrorism, reductions in conventional arms production and trade, and new weapons bans, including missiles and space weapons.

Parliaments everywhere have enormous important roles to play in advancing this global goal, well beyond their responsibilities in ratifying treaties and approving their implementing legislation. They approve budgets. They help set national priorities. They can work to ensure the basic consistency between domestic legislation and international commitments relating to disarmament and non-proliferation. They serve as a forum for debate and for representing the views of constituents. They can work to forge common positions among political parties, while also promoting cooperation among different parliaments, with the help of organizations like the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, and Parliamentarians for Global Action.

Parliaments can also help to inspire their national governments to action in numerous ways, by encouraging them to launch their own disarmament initiatives, hosting meetings, funding studies, promoting diplomatic dialogue, raising the issue in high-level official speeches, and countless other such activities.

Perhaps Jayantha Dhanapala, a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, put it best by once telling an All-Party Group of the UK House of Commons that parliaments “help to give disarmament not only vision, but also some backbone, muscle, and teeth”.

He was absolutely right. Parliaments are indispensable to disarmament.