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Remarks at a Book Promotion Event

*Towards a Nuclear Weapons-Free World*

by

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5 May 2009

We have all heard Shakespeare's famous line from the *Tempest*, "What's past is prologue." This adage, however, can have two meanings with respect to global nuclear disarmament.

There is first of all a cynical interpretation—one that envisions a dark future based on the disappointing history of nuclear disarmament, a record best documented by the continued existence of well over 20,000 nuclear weapons today despite over six decades of efforts to eliminate them.

The other interpretation—which is well represented by the book we are discussing today, *Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World*—seeks to identify some concrete practical steps that the world both can and should take toward finally achieving global nuclear disarmament. Using this approach, the past is not simply a collection of disappointments, but a wellspring for good ideas that deserve to be re-considered, elaborated, and implemented.

One of these wellsprings was Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's "Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-Violent World Order," which he announced in a speech to the UN General Assembly on 9 June 1988. There were of course many obstacles facing that plan—these were, after all, the twilight years of the Cold War and the world's nuclear arsenals were at their highest levels ever.

Yet today hopes are rising once again for fresh progress in this difficult field. Prospects are improving for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and for multilateral negotiations to begin on a verifiable fissile material treaty. The Russian Federation and the United States have begun negotiations on a treaty to replace START-I, which expires later this year, and on another agreement for deeper cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

While circumstances have changed for the better, many obstacles remain, in particular the need to overcome the deceptive lure of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, a doctrine that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called contagious. Whole infrastructures of disarmament must be created, as whole infrastructures that sustain nuclear arms must be dismantled.

This is not easy work, even in an improved international political environment. For this reason, I salute the Indian Centre for Strategic and International Studies for all of its efforts not just to organize a commemorative event for Rajiv Gandhi's Action Plan, but to gather experts from around the world and high-level officials of the Government of India—including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—to explore new possibilities for that plan in our current world. I also wish to commend the Indian Centre for Air Power Studies and KW Publishers for their work in making this book available today.

I hope this book is widely read both here at the United Nations and by all who are interested in pursuing a nuclear-weapon-free world. It will open some eyes—and I hope some minds—as it explores one of the most compelling questions of our time: is global nuclear disarmament achievable? The answer is yes. It must be, for it is the only truly reliable method that will ensure against any future use of such weapons, which would be catastrophic by anybody's definition.

This book is just one of a wave of interesting disarmament proposals to surface in recent years—including many, I might add, that echo many of the specific initiatives that appeared in the Rajiv Gandhi's Action Plan.

So today is not a time for just for looking back, but for identifying what we all must be doing in the future to bring humanity “towards a nuclear weapon free world”. We must not fall into the trap of doing “too little too late.” I prefer the adage, “better late than never.”

My conclusion today is very brief: read this book and join the collective international effort to achieve global nuclear disarmament. Every person's contribution helps a little. Let us start today.