

Keynote Address

Bringing Democracy to Disarmament

By

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***Reaching Nuclear Disarmament –
The Role of Civil Society in Strengthening the NPT***

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It is an honour for me to be with you today in this beautiful city of Stockholm, in a country that has provided such leadership over the years in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons. I thank the Swedish Network for Nuclear Disarmament for organizing this international conference and for all of its continuing efforts on behalf of this very great cause. Needless to say, I also thank the government and people of Sweden for their consistent and steadfast support for progress in this field. Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to the United Nations Association of Sweden for their support in making my participation in this event possible.

Last week, I addressed a conference at the Brazilian Centre for International Relations in my home city of Rio de Janeiro. My remarks dealt with the twin themes of transparency and accountability and their bearing on the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Many statements about this treaty focus on what are commonly called its three legal “pillars”—namely, disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Yet there are three additional political pillars that seldom get the attention they deserve, yet which cannot be ignored in any discussion of the future of this treaty. I mentioned these new pillars in Rio—let me elaborate them today.

The first such pillar is enlightened leadership from key states with nuclear weapons. The second pillar is broad and persistent support and encouragement from governments and the international diplomatic community, especially from non-nuclear-weapon States. And the third pillar is a strong foundation of support in civil society. From the standpoint of the nuclear-weapon states, in particular, political support for disarmament can flow from “top-down”, from “outside-in”, and from “bottom-up”. Ideally, it should come from all three.

Today, I would like to underscore the vital role of this third pillar—the role of civil society in advancing global nuclear disarmament and in strengthening the NPT. My subject can be summarized very briefly as dealing with the challenge of “bringing democracy to disarmament.”

Historically, we all know that key decisions about nuclear weapons are made in secret—and there is no possessor state where this practice has not applied. This secrecy applies to decisions to acquire such weapons, decisions on how and under what circumstances they should be used, decisions on which weapons to produce in the future, decisions on how many to possess, and decisions on what types of controls over such weapons are acceptable.

This type of environment presents enormous challenges for weapons-control advocates in civil society. Even today, for example, we only have rough estimates of how many nuclear weapons exist in the world. Many details about nuclear arsenals are very

closely controlled by States that possess them, including such basic figures as the numbers of warheads, their delivery vehicles, and quantities of fissile material. Some governments sometimes disclose some of this information, while others do not. None, however, has so far presented concrete plans for nuclear disarmament, not to speak of tentative timetables. Nuclear armed States do not seem to have in place structures, legislation or budgets for disarmament.

We know that some reductions have taken place over the past few decades. According to estimates, the total number has come down from about 40.000 to about 25.000, a reduction of nearly 15.000 in the total arsenals. No one seems to know for sure, however, what is the status of those 15.000 weapons. Have they simply been taken out of active deployment, are they stored or mothballed, and most importantly, can they be quickly brought back to active duty? These questions should be answered also in relation to future reductions.

In this connection, one of the most important roles for civil society is to encourage governments to be more open in describing both their own nuclear weapon programmes and their efforts to promote global nuclear disarmament. Facts help in stimulating constructive political action.

Historically, civil society has had some significant achievements in raising awareness and capturing the public conscience. Examples would include efforts in the 1950's and 1960's to end atmospheric nuclear testing because of the growing evidence that fallout from such tests was having serious effects on human health and the environment. Other good examples include the work of civil society in working for a multilateral treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, besides additional efforts to strengthen international cooperation against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Undoubtedly, persistent and effective efforts by individuals and groups in civil society have also influenced the public agendas of many countries when it comes to nuclear disarmament. In the United States, opinion-editorials by George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn have helped to spark a sustained national discussion on the possibilities for actually achieving global nuclear disarmament. Similar examples have come from some European countries. I see support growing for disarmament throughout the world at levels ranging from grass-roots initiatives on one level, to international commissions of distinguished personalities and experts on another level – and many variations in between.

Last September, I attended a major international conference in Mexico City of the non-governmental organizations that are recognized by the UN's Department for Public

Information. At that event, over a thousand representatives from NGOs around the world gathered to consider how progress in disarmament can advance both peace and development goals. That was a significant conference indeed, for it testifies to a growing reality in our world today—namely, the ever-increasing variety of groups in civil society that understand why nuclear disarmament is important and how its advancement can help in the achievement of other social, economic, humanitarian, and environmental goals.

As a result, the burden of advocacy for disarmament is no longer being borne exclusively by the peace groups. Over the years they have found allies among the world's mayors, legislators, lawyers, doctors, women's groups, environmentalists, religious leaders, and countless other key sectors of society. While decisions about nuclear weapons are still made in secret by a small elite, the leaders making those decisions cannot afford to ignore the persistent and growing demands from the people for more progress in this area. Yes, democracy is coming to disarmament.

The future of this rising interest in disarmament, of course, has also been significantly improved by the fact that even some top leaders of key governments are themselves affirming their solemn commitment to working for a world free of nuclear weapons. This is especially apparent in the many individual and joint statements made by Presidents Obama and Medvedev, including statements that have explicitly recognized that progress in disarmament is in fulfilment of obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

As for the treaty itself, I believe its future will be determined largely by the quality, effectiveness, and results of its review process. This subject never seems to get the attention it deserves—or rather, it gets some attention during the sessions of the Preparatory Committees and also every five years at the NPT Review Conferences.

When the treaty was extended indefinitely in 1995, this was achieved through acceptance of a “package deal” that included a decision on strengthening the review process. Those States parties who were sceptical about the need for an indefinite extension of the treaty had to be convinced that the review process would provide a credible means for ensuring accountability in the achievement of the fundamental goals of the treaty, including the goal of disarmament. At the time, the slogan most often used in NPT deliberations was “permanence with accountability.” So far, the NPT seems to have attained permanence, but still lags behind in accountability.

This process was further strengthened at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, further illustrating the importance the States parties attached to these opportunities to review the implementation of the treaty.

So the next review conference in 2010 will provide yet another opportunity for the States parties to review recent information about the concrete results being achieved and on measures to strengthen the Treaty.

While the States parties are the main participants in the review, the information supplied in this process is also quite useful to groups in civil society that are monitoring these conferences. In many ways, these groups help the general public understand the wider purposes of the treaty and what States are doing—or not doing—to fulfil their commitments. I am pleased that in recent years, the States parties have agreed to expand participation by NGO community during the review process, such as by giving them opportunities to give presentations to the delegations, to attend deliberations, and to circulate their publications.

Speaking at the Mexico City conference I mentioned earlier, Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams summarized her advice to NGOs working for nuclear disarmament in five brief words—“communication, communication and more communication.” She implored her fellow colleagues in the NGO community to network together, to share information, and to work with friends and allies in governments that share a common commitment to progress in disarmament. While recognizing growing public interest in disarmament, she cautioned against any assumptions that this interest was self-sustaining. I listened closely to her warning on this—in her own words:

Without deep, broad and sustained collective action by NGOs and civil society to seize upon this incipient momentum to ban nuclear weapons and increase its power and drive, the rather fragile political will out there will evaporate more quickly than it appeared.

I would strongly urge all participants at this conference to weigh those words carefully and consider how best to work to strengthen this political will on all of its various dimensions—top-down, bottom-up, and outside-in. Regardless of the level this political will is exercised, there are certain specific goals that merit persistent action in the short to near-term—goals that are further elaborated in the five-point proposal made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 24 October last year.

First, the whole world is now hoping for the success of negotiations between the United States and the Russian Federation on a new strategic arms reduction treaty, not so much for the reductions themselves, but because this may signal the political will to pursue the disarmament obligations. Hence, there is also strong support worldwide for additional efforts in the years ahead not just to reduce deployments, but to destroy verifiably and irreversibly the warheads themselves. From a global perspective, the best way to achieve this goal would be through negotiation of a nuclear weapon convention, or

a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments, as Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon proposed in his 24 October 2008 speech on disarmament. I know of no other way this goal can fully be achieved in a manner that is universal, transparent, irreversible, verifiable, and binding.

Second, the time has come to strengthen security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states. Existing assurances are still conditional, and the best way to strengthen the binding security assurances provided through the protocols of regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties would be for all of the nuclear-weapon states to ratify all of those protocols and remove the reservations they have placed on them. The UN Security Council, which held an historic summit-level meeting on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation last September, can also be called upon to hold additional meetings on these issues, with a view to strengthening security assurances and to commencing discussions on plans for the maintenance of security in the nuclear disarmament process.

Third, I believe that civil society can do a lot to strengthen the rule of law in disarmament. This includes new efforts to achieve the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and to commence negotiations on a fissile material treaty at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. While it is true that neither of these treaties will alone prevent proliferation, they will both make substantial contributions to that goal, while also assisting in the achievement of the disarmament objective of the NPT. Efforts are also long overdue for implementing the Middle East Resolution, adopted as part of the “package deal” that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. The lack of any serious efforts to pursue the goal of creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would only further jeopardize prospects for a successful review conference next year.

Fourth, civil society must continue its efforts to strengthen accountability and transparency, especially with respect to basic information about the aggregate size of nuclear arsenals, holdings of delivery vehicles, stocks of fissile material held for weapons and other useful information. The UN Secretariat stands ready to serve as a common repository of such data.

Fifth, progress in nuclear disarmament is most likely to be sustainable if it is accompanied by complementary efforts in other areas—including, the elimination of other types of weapons of mass destruction, the prevention of WMD terrorism, limits on the production and trade in conventional arms, and new bans on missiles and space weapons. Civil society can also support the recommendation of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by Hans Blix, to urge the General Assembly to convene a “world summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass

destruction.” I must emphasize, however, that these are truly complementary measures, not pre-conditions, for disarmament to proceed.

In conclusion, let me say that it is a humbling experience indeed for me to stand here and provide counsel on disarmament initiatives, in a country that has given the world such figures as Olof Palme, Anna Lindh, Alva Myrdal, Maj Britt Theorin, Inga Thorsson, Hans Blix, Rolf Ekeus, Henrik Salander, several former disarmament officials in the UN Secretariat, experts from some of the world’s most renowned research and academic institutions, and countless disarmament initiatives from its ambassadors from both government and civil society. And I have of course not forgotten Dag Hammarskjöld, who in 1955 referred to disarmament as a “hardy perennial” at the United Nations.

Because of this history of common commitment and vision, I very much look forward to the results of your deliberations at this conference, and to learn what more the United Nations can do to advance the great cause of nuclear disarmament, in partnership with civil society. It is time for our hardy perennial to bloom.