

**The Aftermath of the NPT Review Conference:
The United Nations and Prospects for Nuclear Disarmament**

By

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Plenary I

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I wish to begin by thanking International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)—not just for inviting me to speak today, but for their long and distinguished record of contributions to the great cause of global nuclear disarmament.

Although the theme of this Congress is *Nuclear Abolition: For a Future*, my remarks will build on the proposition that lessons of the past probably offer the best foundation for charting the road ahead. This approach also fits with the title of this plenary session on the History of Nuclear Abolition.

Much, of course, has changed in our world since IPPNW won its Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for its impressive work on behalf of nuclear disarmament. According to figures maintained by the US-based Natural Resources Defense Council, the total number of nuclear weapons that existed globally at that time exceeded 60,000. Based on official but unverified declarations, the world today has a little over a third of this number—a significant drop indeed.

Yet there are other ways to view these numbers—assuming of course that they are accurate. The NRDC has also estimated that there were just over 39,000 such weapons when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was signed in 1968—while today there are about 23,000, which represents a reduction of some 16,000 in 42 years, or an average rate of reduction of about 380 weapons a year. If we continue at that rate, we will finally have achieved zero in about 60 more years, or roughly the year 2070.

Now, the year 2070 will be when the UN marks its 125th anniversary. It will be 124 years after the General Assembly adopted its first resolution, which called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons and other weapons adaptable to mass destruction. It will be 109 years after the Soviet Union and the United States agreed at the United Nations on a common joint statement on “general and complete disarmament”—and 92 years after the General Assembly agreed by consensus that general and complete disarmament was the world community’s “ultimate goal.”

By the year 2070, there will be no chance whatsoever that the last living survivor of the atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki will have lived to witness the dawn of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

There are other reasons why these figures are quite troubling. After all, Article VI of the NPT obligated each of its Parties to undertake “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament”. At the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, the nuclear-weapon States pledged their determined pursuit of “systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goals of eliminating those weapons.” In 1996, the International Court of Justice issued its historic Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, which contained the unanimous opinion that “[t]here exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict

and effective international control.” At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon States made an “unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament.” And at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon States agreed to 22 specific “Actions” to implement the Article VI of the NPT relating to disarmament.

Yet as of August 2010, not one nuclear weapon has been physically destroyed pursuant to a treaty commitment and multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations are still not underway. The world has of course welcomed other agreements setting limits on deployments of strategic offensive nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles. There have been some declarations of unilateral reductions, and other actions—including the closing of some nuclear test sites, the announcement of moratoria on nuclear tests, and the closure of some facilities for producing fissile material for weapons.

Yet we have also encountered circular arguments that as long as nuclear weapons exist somewhere—anywhere—they simply must be retained. This dictum raises concerns not only for the future of nuclear disarmament, but also for the future of nuclear non-proliferation. As the Canberra Commission reported in 1996, “As long as any state has nuclear weapons, there will be others, state or sub-state actors, who will seek to acquire them.” This is a theme that was later underscored by both the Blix WMD Commission in 2006 and the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament in 2009.

We also see that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence is persisting in various forms—as a defense against nuclear attacks, as an alleged means to protect allies, or as a means to deter the use of other weapons of mass destruction and even conventional weapons. We are often assured that this capability is only kept to a “minimum” level. In October 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon termed this doctrine to be “contagious,” as some nine states today employ it in various forms—not including those states covered by nuclear umbrellas. And if other states acquire such weapons, one can rest assured that nuclear deterrence will be high on the list of rationales for acquisition.

Even what we are not seeing is rather alarming. We are not seeing the establishment of nuclear disarmament institutions, laws, policies, and budgets in the states that currently possess such weapons. While all states with nuclear weapons officially support the goal of global nuclear disarmament, none is willing to agree to a timeline for achieving that goal. We are also seeing strong opposition to the goal of negotiating a nuclear weapons convention, despite the strong and growing support it has earned worldwide.

I would like to note at this point that this is a goal now being advocated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons – which was established by the IPPNW—and by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Third World Congress of Speakers of Parliament, the European Parliament, over 4,000 worldwide members of Mayors for Peace, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and countless other

civil society organizations and governments worldwide. At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, I had the honour to receive—on behalf of the United Nations—petitions with literally millions of signatures in support of the Secretary-General’s nuclear disarmament proposals and the specific goal of negotiating a nuclear weapons convention.

Perhaps most perplexing is the claim that it is somehow “premature” to consider the notion of a nuclear weapons convention—even as a subject suitable for debate, analysis, study, and discussion, let alone negotiation.

Personally, I find it difficult to imagine how global nuclear disarmament will ever be achieved without binding legal obligations. It certainly will not be constructed on a foundation of press releases, toasts, unilateral gestures, or lofty tributes to visions and dreams. How can the solemn disarmament criteria established by multilateral fora like the General Assembly and NPT Review Conferences ever reasonably be achieved without binding legal commitments—criteria that include verification, irreversibility, transparency, and universality? What is the conceivable meaning of “negotiations” in Article VI of the NPT, if not in conjunction with the creation of binding legal commitments? And how can global nuclear disarmament ever be achieved if it is not fully multilateral in scope?

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness throughout the world community—even if not yet universal—that nuclear disarmament is not just an ideal, but is instead both a practical necessity and a moral imperative. Speaker after speaker at the 2010 NPT Review Conference not only stressed the need for further progress in this field, but a majority also supported the notion of establishing some timelines for achieving this progress, while also voicing their support for the idea of a nuclear weapons convention.

I was very pleased indeed that the Final Document of that conference included references to the Secretary-General’s five-point nuclear disarmament proposal, including the issue of a nuclear weapons convention, while also noting the support for timelines. In addition, the Final Document referred to the humanitarian dimension of nuclear weapons, a theme that the Government of Switzerland as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross have been advancing—as most recently illustrated by the eloquent and compelling Statement by the ICRC’s President, Jakob Kellenberger, in his statement to the Geneva Diplomatic Corps on 20 April of this year.

These various elements in the Final Document—the call for concrete disarmament steps, the positive language on timelines, the references to a nuclear weapons convention, the framing of nuclear weapons in light of responsibilities under international humanitarian law, a reaffirmation of the value of binding negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states, in addition to the overwhelming support for the negotiation of a fissile material treaty and for entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty—all of these, together, are like seeds that have been planted in the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Like any seed, however, its future depends on its growth environment, which in this case is substantially determined by human actions. None of the initiatives to strengthen the three pillars of the NPT—that is, disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy—are self-implementing. And all are very closely related to each other. This is the essence of the “grand bargain” that has been at the heart of the NPT ever since its origin.

What I believe happened at the 2010 NPT Review Conference was that the Treaty’s States Parties unambiguously reaffirmed the key elements of this grand bargain, while identifying 64 specific Actions to implement that bargain, plus additional steps to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. The great Italian writer Giuseppe di Lampedusa once wrote in his novel, *The Leopard*, that “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.”

In terms of the NPT, for the grand bargain to survive, substantially greater progress is needed in the field of nuclear disarmament. I believe this will be key to achieving many of the widely desired reforms in the field of nuclear non-proliferation—relating for example, to establishing the Additional Protocol as the international safeguards standard, ensuring universal implementation of comprehensive IAEA safeguards agreements, deliberating possible approaches for multilateral cooperation in the nuclear fuel cycle, and addressing issues relating to the enforcement of the NPT and the implementation of its withdraw provisions.

I am not saying that progress will necessarily be marked by a quid pro quo involving all of these elements, and am certainly not suggesting that progress on non-proliferation is somehow being held hostage to nuclear disarmament. But I think it is fair to say that the climate or environment for future progress in non-proliferation will be significantly influenced by demonstrable and significant progress in nuclear disarmament, especially along the lines indicated at the last NPT Review Conference.

As for the role of the United Nations, we will be quite busy in assisting progress in all these fields.

On 24 September, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will open a high-level meeting at the United Nations to consider issues relating to the work of the Conference on Disarmament—the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum which has been deadlocked for the last 14 years. If we truly want to strengthen the rule of law in disarmament, in terms of creating multilateral legal norms of universal scope, I believe that CD can and must play a vital role in this process.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference also gave the Secretary-General mandates to convene a conference on the “full implementation” of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, as well as to appoint a facilitator for such a conference, and to select a host government, in cooperation with the original co-sponsors of that Resolution, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and in consultation with the States of the region. I cannot possibly overstate the importance of significant progress in establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, not just for

the region itself, but for international peace and security overall, including the health of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. In some ways, the future of the NPT will very likely be shaped if not determined by the outcome of that process.

Looking further ahead, I would say that the brightest future of the NPT will be determined by a convergence of three very powerful political forces. One flows from enlightened leadership from states that possess nuclear weapons, as reflected in the readiness of such states to follow through on their disarmament commitments and, above all, to deepen the roots of disarmament into domestic laws, policies, institutions, and budgets. Another flows from the persistent efforts throughout the international diplomatic community—including but not limited to the middle-power states—to press for progress in establishing a nuclear-weapon-free world. And the third such force comes from the people—from sustained initiatives from ever-broadening and diverse groups in civil society, working in partnership across disciplines, interests, and national borders.

As I look around me today, I have many reasons to believe that the future will indeed bring many steps forward, because many of these political forces are already at work. The presence on our panel today of Professor Lawrence Wittner—who is arguably the leading historian of nuclear disarmament movements around the world—helps to underscore the importance of civil society in inspiring and motivating national leaders of all countries to raise the priority of disarmament in their own national agendas.

I know that civil society groups cannot alone bear the entire burden of leading us to a nuclear-weapon-free world, but through their influence on states, they will undoubtedly have a vitally important roles to play in the years ahead, both in mobilizing public support and in influencing official policies. The United Nations—whose Charter begins with the words “we the peoples”—will continue to work closely with such groups, including through our efforts to promote disarmament and non-proliferation education, in assisting in conducting research, issuing publications, holding seminars and workshops, and helping such groups to participate in conferences held pursuant to the relevant multilateral treaties.

So while I have some concerns about the future of nuclear disarmament, I also have solid grounds for hope for progress in the years ahead. I take some comfort in the skills that are represented on this panel today, and in the highly competent work of the IPPNW in organizing this Congress on the theme of nuclear disarmament. This is truly, as Hamlet would say, “an enterprise of great pith and moment,” deserving indeed “the name of action.”