

Organizing for the NPT Review Conference: Seeking a Commitment to Begin Negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Abolition Treaty.

International Peace Bureau Conference
Washington, D.C., November 15, 2009

Let me begin by reminding you that the city of Hiroshima was completely destroyed in nine seconds. Today the world's nuclear powers possess an estimated 23,000 nuclear weapons, each averaging 20 times the power of the Hiroshima A-bomb. Ninety-seven percent of these genocidal and potentially omnicidal weapons are in the arsenals of the United States and Russia.

I also want to recall the words of Dr. Joseph Rotblat, the Nobel Peace Laureate who was the sole senior scientist to have had the moral vision and courage to resign from the Manhattan Project rather than contribute to the creation of nuclear weapons. Years later, at a conference in Hiroshima, and I am sure elsewhere, he warned as clearly as he could that "The human species faces a stark choice. We can either abolish nuclear weapons or witness their global proliferation, and the nuclear wars that will inevitably follow." He also explained why: No nation will long tolerate what it experiences to be an unjust imbalance of power, in this case terror.

Next year will be a critical year in determining whether humanity will move in the direction of eliminating the existential threats posed by the world's nuclear arsenals, or if we will continue on the path of greater nuclear weapons proliferation and the increased danger of genocidal nuclear wars. In early 2010 START 1 Follow On Treaty negotiations are scheduled to be completed and the treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate. President Obama hopes to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to the U.S. Senate if he can find sufficient votes to ensure its ratification, and of greatest moment, the seminal important Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will be held at the United Nations in May.

As many of you here know, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which went into force in 1972, rests on three pillars: the right of non-nuclear nations to have access to technology and resources to produce nuclear power for peaceful purposes – which was a profound mistake, but is the law according to the Treaty, the pledge by these non-nuclear states not to develop or possess nuclear weapons, and (in Article VI) the commitment by the nuclear powers to negotiate the complete elimination of their arsenals. Since the Treaty went into effect, the arsenals of the nuclear nations have increased, and four additional nations have joined the "nuclear club."

Although it has been almost sixty-five years since the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, the danger of the United States or other nuclear powers initiating nuclear war is anything but remote or abstract. In addition to the dangers of accidental or unauthorized launching of nuclear weapons, there is the little known history that since the Nagasaki A-bombing, during wars and international crises, the United States has prepared and threatened to initiate nuclear war at least 40 times: nine times during Middle East wars and crises, at least times against North Korea, at least five times during the Indochina war, and during confrontations with the Soviet Union, China and even in Latin America.

The United States is not alone in having made such threats and preparations. Each of the other eight nuclear powers has prepared for and/or threatened to initiate nuclear war at least once.

That said, the diplomatic path to a world without nuclear weapons has been known since 1961, when the U.S. and Soviet Union signed onto the McCloy-Zorin Agreement, establishing the foundation for all future arms control agreements which they understood to be the roadmap for nuclear weapons abolition.

In 2000, the nuclear powers were forced to reaffirm their irrevocable commitment to fulfilling Article VI and to implementing 13 steps in that direction. Only one half of one step of has since been implemented by the United States. Worse, in 2005, the Bush Administration subverted the NPT Review Conference and the Treaty itself by refusing to accept an agenda for the Conference until it was half way over and the refusing to negotiate in good faith, leading to the collapse of the Conference. With its “romance of ruthlessness”, it believed that it could impose non-proliferation through the threat of unilateral attacks.

Understanding that the possible collapse of the NPT order increases the dangers of nuclear attacks against the United States, major figures in the U.S. elite, including Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn used the pages of the Wall Street Journal to warn about the dangers of proliferation and urged the U.S. to initiate significant reductions of its arsenal and to reaffirm its commitment to Article VI. They understood that this is absolutely necessary if the U.S. is to regain the necessary legitimacy and leverage to win agreements from the non-nuclear states during the 2010 NPT Review Conference for more intrusive inspections in order to prevent any of these nations from “breaking out” and becoming nuclear powers.

Relying on statements from the elite, as I’ve mentioned, President Obama has committed to pursue arms control efforts, and he vowed to reduce U.S. reliance on its nuclear arsenal. In Prague, he reaffirmed his commitment to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. **BUT**, he added the caveat, “perhaps not in my lifetime”, that signaled his true priority: Non-proliferation. A close reading of his subsequent statements and those of his disarmament negotiators makes clear that non-proliferation, not abolition, is his Administration’s goal. Hillary Clinton, with her typical bluntness, put it succinctly in her recent speech to the U.S. Institute of Peace, when she said that abolition will not occur in the lifetimes of several generations!

While many of us in the U.S. peace movement will be working for the clean (unamended) ratification of the START 1 Follow On and CTB Treaties, I want to focus on, and invite you to join organizing being done by an increasingly large network of international organizations and networks as we build toward the NPT Review.

During the 2008 NPT Preparatory Committee last May, NGOs from around the world held a series of meetings in the stuffy over crowded rooms in the basement of the United Nations. Together we shared analyses and charted plans for next year’s NPT Review. We agreed that our goal is to have the Review conclude with a commitment by the nuclear powers to commence negotiations for a nuclear weapons abolition treaty or convention, and we agreed to a number of joint actions. They include:

1. Support the Abolition Flame Campaign (www.abolitionflame.org) that Pierre Villiard has described, and which we hope will serve to generate 25,000 letters to Presidents Obama and Medvedev
2. To coordinate a series of abolition petition campaigns, including those of Gensuikyo and Mayors for Peace which seek to deliver twenty million signatures to the United Nations, with those of ICAN, the U.S. peace movement and others. The signatures will be delivered in a formal ceremony at the beginning of the Review.

3. To organize an international conference on April 30 and May 1 which will serve as a forum to share analyses and to prepare for the Review Conference and beyond
4. To hold a massive march, rally and festival on May 2, the Sunday before the Review Conference begins as a way to focus media and international attention on the imperative of abolition
5. To facilitate an international youth presence throughout the NPT Review.

We have since pulled together an International Planning Group consisting of representatives from roughly twenty international and national abolition and peace organizations here in the U.S., in Europe, Asia and Latin America. In our discussions, we have agreed that in order to succeed, we need to make common cause with other movements working to address human needs, to preserve the environment, and for social and economic justice.

In addition to the circulation of petitions, the center piece of our organizing in the coming months is the Disarm Now! call (<http://www.afsc.org/cambridge/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/83097>), which was drafted by Kate Hudson of C.N.D. and which has been endorsed by more than 120 organizations, as we aim for 1,000 endorsements to reinforce our demand that the Review Conference conclude with a commitment to begin negotiations on a nuclear weapons abolition treaty.

All of us here know that it will take the unified and dynamic force of people's power – worldwide – to move the nuclear powers. Let me encourage and appeal to you to join us. Have your organizations endorse the Disarm Now! call. Circulate our or other abolition petitions. And when you return home, please do what you can to mobilize people in your organizations and communities to join the thousands of people from across the United States, the thousand peace activists and Hibakusha who will be coming from Japan, and our partners from Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia who will be marching for abolition on May 2.