**An Evangelical Christian Perspective on Nuclear Disarmament**

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Speakers and Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor to represent the National Association of Evangelicals of the United States at this important conference on nuclear disarmament. As one of the three major families of Christians, evangelicals make up about 25% of the U.S. population, and about 8% of the world population. We are noted for the high confidence we place in the Bible, God’s Word, and for our commitment to following Jesus, a Palestinian Jew who was born in Asia and who became a refugee in Africa, who was unjustly condemned and executed, but now, we believe, is alive and teaching us to live in peace with our neighbors as God intended, in this life and beyond. Evangelical Christians believe that Jesus’ teaching extends to every area of life.

In 2011 the National Association of Evangelicals issued a [resolution](http://nae.net/nuclear-weapons/) calling for a profound rethinking of the rationale that has been offered for the continued possession of nuclear weapons. [[1]](#endnote-1)

From a moral perspective, it is difficult to justify any security strategy that relies on threatening the annihilation of large numbers of civilians. All modern warfare threatens civilians, but nuclear weapons remain in a class by themselves due to the scale of their destruction. Nuclear weapons are also morally suspect because they lack proportionality.

The devastation they threaten would persist long after the end of any war in which they are used.

The scale of destruction necessarily ignores our creaturely and generational limits. Nuclear weapons represent the prideful assertion that we as humans have the right to rob future generations of the gift of life that we have enjoyed. It is unlikely that any modern war could be conducted according to traditional just war principles, and it is certain that any nuclear war would violate those principles. Even where the Bible allowed for warfare under limited circumstances, for example, permitting the cutting of trees to construct siege works, soldiers were forbidden to cut down fruit trees, which would be needed long after the war is over.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Even a limited nuclear exchange would not only kill the fruit trees, but unleash a nuclear winter causing global famine for at least a decade. And if any were to survive starvation, they would be subject to radiation, which kills both instantaneously and over many years and decades, by causing cancers and other fatal diseases.[[3]](#endnote-3)

As Kazakhstan knows all too well, millions of people throughout the world have already suffered illness and even death as a result of the fallout from nuclear testing.

Today, a quarter century after the end of the Cold War, thousands of nuclear weapons remain on hair trigger alert, ready to fire at a moment’s notice. The world has managed to avoid outright nuclear war or terrorism for the past 70 years, but it is imprudent, and totally unnecessary, to press our luck.

There have been too many close calls. And whether the inevitable failure comes by accident, computer error, miscalculation, terrorism or insanity, the end result will be the same: death, famine, economic and environmental catastrophe, and the end of modern life as we have known it.

Critics are right to warn that well intentioned but poorly implemented nuclear disarmament policies could risk dangerous destabilization. And nuclear abolitionists, in our zeal to save the world, have not always been the most articulate advocates. We have at times not spoken to the real fears and concerns of our fellow citizens, or built the unlikely coalitions with diverse constituencies that will be required to change policy. Indeed, some of you, particularly my fellow Americans, may see evangelical Christians as an “unlikely” coalition partner.

But surely the solution is not to remain paralyzed in an untenable status quo, but to do the difficult but achievable negotiations that the nuclear armed nations of the world pledged back in 1970 when they signed the nonproliferation treaty. Nearly a half century later, we have seen some reductions in numbers of weapons, but, inexplicably, the continued waste of precious resources being poured down the rat hole of “modernization.”

Frankly, most people in the world are not focused on the nuclear threat. We need to persist until we get their attention.

For evangelical Christians, the mandates of our faith to pursue peace and to cherish life and the dignity of every human being, coincide with the prudential judgments of our best security experts. We must follow the example of the people and leaders of Kazakhstan, who determined that their national security would be best protected by divesting the nation of its nuclear weapons. As we return to our respective countries, let us each work for the day when we can live in a world free of nuclear weapons.

Such a world will continue to pose many challenges to those concerned about war, poverty, disease, environmental degradation, and other problems that continue to plague humanity. But we will have taken off the table a game changing threat, and in the process freed up precious resources to tackle these other challenges.

1. <http://nae.net/nuclear-weapons/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Deuteronomy 20:19-20 “When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls.” [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See for example this report from Physicians for Social Responsibility: <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/two-billion-at-risk.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)