

Building a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World

International Conference and Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the closing the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan independence

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“Achieving collective global security”

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Thanks to people and government of Kazakhstan

And to PNND

Ladies and gentlemen

I want to contribute a single idea to this conference, and this concerns the necessary linkage between the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and the establishment of collective global security.

This fits, I believe, with some remarks in President Nazarbayev’s opening speech today

(as translated) : liberation of the planet will require deep mental changes, need well-developed algorithms for action)

Demilitarization should be multilateral – some 20 states, including those who possess nuclear weapons and those on the threshold)

Greetings from my part of the world, the Pacific Islands, a region that in 1985 banned the testing and possession of nuclear weapons.¹ The peoples of the Marshall Islands and of

¹ <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201445/volume-1445-I-24592-English.pdf>

French Polynesia have experienced first-hand the impact of nuclear testing, and some have also experienced the difficulties involved in seeking legal redress.² In 1986 the Governments of France and New Zealand sought the mediation services of the UN Secretary General to resolve a dispute following the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing of a year earlier.³ In 2014 the Republic of the Marshall Islands filed an application with the International Court of Justice to hold the nine nuclear-armed states accountable for violations of international law with respect to their nuclear disarmament obligations under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and customary international law.

The members of the United Nations Association of New Zealand, for their part, have long supported efforts within the UN system to reduce weapons of all kinds – whether small arms, landmines, or nuclear devices - and have voiced their support for strengthening the roles and functions of international institutions and international law in the service of disarmament.

Successive New Zealand governments have held a similar commitment. They have actively participated in global dialogue on nuclear security issues, in the Nuclear Security Summit, the Global Partnership Against Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons initiative, and the Global Initiative to Counter Nuclear Terrorism.⁴ These governments have also acknowledged and welcomed the role of civil society in raising awareness of the threat that nuclear weapons pose, and in assisting in campaigns toward their total elimination.⁵ During 2015-16 New Zealand has served as an elected member of the UN Security Council, demonstrating that small states can contribute well to addressing global conflicts.

Although the people of world are now more interconnected than at any previous time in human history, our common destiny on planet earth continues to include the prospect of annihilation – or at a minimum – a “nuclear winter” with catastrophic consequences. Weaponry became so powerful in the course of the twentieth century that its full use became unthinkable.

² The New Zealand Government called on the mediation services of the UN Secretary General in its dispute with France following the Rainbow Warrior affair of 1985. The Marshall Islands established a Nuclear Claims Tribunal: <http://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/Nuclear%20Claims%20Tribunal-Thornburg-Report.pdf>;

³ https://www.jstor.org/stable/20693156?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

⁴ <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/disarmament/biochemical/>

⁵ http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com14/statements/20Oct_NewZealand.pdf

While some progress toward the goal of saving “...succeeding generations from the scourge of war”⁶ has been made under the provisions of the UN Charter, decisions of the UN Security Council continue to be more bound by calculations of national than global interest. The perpetual incumbency of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council together with the veto powers they possess have influenced, for instance, their lack of effort to reduce nuclear arsenals under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Security Council could respond more effectively, furthermore, to its responsibilities under Article 26, which states:

“In order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources, the Security Council shall be responsible for formulating, with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article 47, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.”⁷

Those countries that possess nuclear weapons and refuse to reduce - let alone eliminate - them, argue that their strategy has delivered effective deterrence. This approach, even if it had some weight for the post-World War II decades, is insufficient justification for its continuation in the 21st century and beyond. The use of nuclear weapons holds the prospect of “mutually assured destruction” rather than security, and at the minimum a “humanitarian disaster” of unthinkable dimensions. The resources spent developing, maintaining, and securing nuclear weapons are lost to their alternate potential investment in health, education, transport and communications, which are at core of human security as the concept is now understood.

However, the main point I wish to emphasise in this brief presentation does not focus on the cost of nuclear weapons, nor their moral indefensibility, nor the flawed logic that seeks to assert their strategic effectiveness. The key idea is that total nuclear disarmament is not possible without the concomitant establishment of an accepted framework for security on global scale.

⁶ <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/fact-sheets/critical-issues/4565-article-26-of-the-un-charter>; see also Costa Rica’s proposal to the UN regarding article 26 at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Disarm%20S2008697.pdf>

Such a framework requires the nations of the world to make a binding pact limiting their armaments to those required for defensive purposes, and to agree to respond collectively to subsequent aggression by any nation against others. Banning nuclear weapons and making other prohibitions will not in themselves remove the root causes of war: a global consciousness and universal framework are also required.

Such a vision, as proposed for instance by the Bahá'í International Community,⁸ is global as distinct to international, and it is pragmatic. But such vision only becomes reality through the achievement of incremental steps. With global effort, states and civil society will eventually eradicate not only weapons of mass destruction, will define with clarity laws against aggression,⁹ and will establish a global collective security framework far more comprehensive than existing regional security blocks - which in themselves make the current world less secure since they breed insecurity in those blocks of nations who they identify as the future potential foe. Other incremental steps include establishing a global boundaries commission to determine the legitimacy of states borders, establishing compulsory jurisdiction for the UN's courts and tribunals, and developing stronger mechanisms for the enforcement of their decisions.

The United Nations continues to be the foremost venue for coordinating the interests of the world's nation-states, and on occasion it does refine its procedures in response to public pressure – such as the more transparent approach to the selection of the next UN Secretary General. However, its members remain divided on such other critical reform topics as the composition and powers of the Security Council, and on the commitment of armed forces to UN authority (article 47) – to name just two.

I commend all 10 recommendations in the Astana vision. In particular, I have focused on the implications of recommendation 9:

Eliminate the reliance on nuclear deterrence in security doctrines, and instead resolve international conflicts through diplomacy, law, regional mechanisms, the United Nations and other peaceful means.

What world-shaping events do governments need to witness before they agree to the elimination of nuclear weapons? Will a treaty established by a majority of the UN's member

⁸ <https://www.bic.org/statements/turning-point-all-nations#III>

⁹ https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/document/49HansD_20090819_00001543/international-non-aggression-and-lawful-use-of-force-bill

states outlawing the testing and possession of nuclear weapons be accepted by the small number of the UN's members that are such possessors? Will the UN manage to transition from an international inter-governmental organization into a global one? Conferences such as this are the appropriate context to air concerns and to imagine possible futures. The need of our time is not "merely" the banning of nuclear weapons, but the establishment of truly global collective security. No-one wants disarmament to result in a less secure world; the challenge is to address the insecurities of both nuclear and non-nuclear powers simultaneously, so that no excuses remain for the continued reliance on current doctrines.