Eliminating Nuclear Weapons
No Longer The Impossible Dream

National Consultative Committee on Disarmament Conference May 2009

A world free of nuclear weapons: the fierce urgency of now

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Ladies and gentlemen …

There has never been a better time to achieve total nuclear disarmament; this is necessary, feasible and urgent. We are at the crossroads of a crisis involving these worst weapons of terror, presenting both danger and opportunity.

On the one hand, disarmament has been stalled and a major nuclear arms control Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, has been abandoned. The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has been paralysed for 13 years since it negotiated the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996, which is yet to enter into force. All the nuclear weapons states continue to develop new nuclear weapons and missiles, have threatened to use them against non-nuclear attack and even pre-emptively, and lowered the threshold for their use. Nuclear tests continue. Military budgets, currently at an obscene US$1.3 trillion plus per year, continue to grow. Nuclear weapon numbers have declined from close to 70,000 to 25,000, but so bloated are these arsenals that the danger to the security and survival of all of us and the ecosystems on which we depend remains undiminished. The risk of use of nuclear weapons has not gone away since the end of the Cold War; rather, it has grown.

We are at an alarming tipping point on proliferation of nuclear weapons, with increasingly widespread access to nuclear expertise, technology and materials. Smuggling of fissile materials has been extensive and for years the AQ Khan black market network, active in over 30 countries, peddled centrifuges for enriching uranium and Chinese nuclear weapons designs. More countries have nuclear weapons; more than 40 could produce nuclear weapons within a matter of months if they so chose, by either enriching uranium further from reactor to weapons grade, or extracting plutonium from the fuel used in a nuclear reactor. International terrorists actively seek nuclear weapons.
The rule of law we need strengthened to address the complex global problems which increasingly interconnect us all has instead been weakened by a drift towards a nuclear law of the jungle. The disastrous invasion and occupation of Iraq, and its continuing humanitarian disaster, was justified as a pre-emptive war

of non-proliferation. Concern about construction of a possible covert nuclear facility in Syria should have lead to an immediate and thorough IAEA investigation, not unilateral and hazardous bombing, with involvement of the IAEA only 5 months later.

On the other hand, we have perhaps the best opportunity ever to abolish nuclear weapons. The current crises in disarmament, non-proliferation, the rule of law and risks of use nuclear weapons have spawned widespread realization that nuclear business as usual is in fact an inexorable slide towards nuclear anarchy and disaster; and that the mere possession of nuclear weapons undermines the security of all. For the first time, a US President has been elected with a commitment to nuclear weapons abolition, and President Obama has outlined a substantive program to deliver on this, and is demonstrating that he is serious. He will face significant opposition from those who profit from and have accessed huge budgets and built careers constructing the vast Doomsday machine, and who fail to understand that unless nuclear weapons are ultimately abolished the likelihood of their use, with massive destruction to the world, will grow year by year. President Obama needs and deserves all the support and encouragement in the world.

We do not know how long this opportunity will last. Unlike the last one, at the end of the Cold War, it must not be squandered, and a process for getting to zero, even if in thirty years' time, should be locked in place. It is time that the nuclear powers took seriously Article VI of the Non Proliferation Treaty, which commits them to making moves towards nuclear disarmament. So far that clause has been ignored. An increasingly resource and climate-stressed world is an ever more dangerous place for nuclear weapons. We simply must not fail.

Like preventing rampant climate change, abolishing nuclear weapons is a paramount challenge for people and leaders the world over; a precondition for survival, sustainability and health for our planet and future generations. Both in the scale of the indiscriminate devastation they cause, and in their uniquely persistent, spreading, genetically damaging radioactive fallout, nuclear weapons are unlike any other 'weapons'. They cannot be used for any legitimate military purpose. Any use, or threat of use, should be a violation of international humanitarian law. The notion that nuclear weapons can ensure anyone's security is fundamentally flawed. Nuclear weapons most threaten those who possess them, or claim protection from them, because they become the preferred targets for others' nuclear weapons. Accepting that nuclear weapons can have a legitimate place, even if solely for 'deterrence', means being willing to accept the incineration of tens of millions of fellow humans and radioactive devastation of large areas, and is fundamentally immoral. Nuclear weapons cannot be divided into those for use and those for deterrence. Deterrence is predicated on having the demonstrated capacity

and will to unleash nuclear weapons, and runs on fallible systems on high-alert which have already almost failed us more than 5 times.

As noted by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission headed by Dr Hans Blix, “So long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain, there is a risk that they will one day be used, by design or accident. And any such use would be catastrophic.” Weapons capable of inflicting such catastrophic destruction have no place in human affairs. The only sustainable approach is one universal standard – zero nuclear weapons – for all.

Recent scientific evidence from the same state-of-the-art climate models which underpin our understanding of global warming puts the case for urgent nuclear weapons abolition beyond dispute. Even a limited regional nuclear war involving targeting cities with 100 Hiroshima-sized bombs – just 0.03% of the explosive power of the world’s current nuclear arsenal - would not only kill tens of millions quickly from blast, fires and radiation, but would cause unexpectedly severe climatic consequences persisting for a decade or more. Millions of tons of black, sooty smoke would be lofted high into the stratosphere, beyond rain and weather. Cooling and darkening, with killing frosts and shortened growing seasons, rainfall decline, monsoon failure, and substantial increases in ultraviolet radiation, would combine to slash global food production over successive years. Globally, one billion people could starve. More would succumb from the disease epidemics and social and economic mayhem which would inevitably follow. Global trade, transport and inputs to agriculture would be disrupted, those with food would hoard it, and further violent conflict would be likely.

Even though 96% of the world’s nuclear weapons are held by Russia and the US, such a war is with-in the capacity of China, France, the UK, Israel or India and Pakistan. Preventing any use of nuclear weapons and establishing a process with no capacity for withdrawal that will get us to zero are imperative for the security of every inhabitant of our planet. It might be worth noting that today we should be more worried about Pakistan than Afghanistan. The possibility that Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal could fall into the hands of the Taliban is real and of enormous concern to those determining policies in south Asia.

The most effective, expeditious and practical way to achieve and sustain the abolition of nuclear weapons is to negotiate a comprehensive, irreversible, binding, verifiable treaty - a Nuclear Weapons Convention – bringing together all the necessary aspects of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation into one phased package which provides a roadmap to zero. Such a treaty approach has been the basis for all successes to date in eliminating whole classes of weapons, from dum dum bullets to chemical and biological weapons, landmines and, most

recently, cluster munitions. And nuclear weapons are far more destructive than any of those.

Negotiations should begin without delay, progress in good faith and without interruption until a successful conclusion is reached. It will be a long and complex process, and the sooner it can begin the better. I agree with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon that the model nuclear weapons convention developed by an international collaboration of lawyers, physicians and scientists is "a good point of departure" for achieving total nuclear disarmament.

Incremental steps can support a comprehensive treaty approach. They can achieve important ends, demonstrate good faith, generate political momentum, fit into and support a unified framework towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Important disarmament and non-proliferation next steps have been repeatedly identified and are widely agreed; they remain valid but unfulfilled over the many years that disarmament has been stalled.

The 13 practical steps agreed at the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference in 2000 should be upheld and implemented. They include all nuclear weapons states committing to the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals; entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; negotiations on a treaty to end production of fissile material; taking weapons off extremely hazardous high alert 'launch on warning' status; and negotiating deep weapons reductions.

But at the same time a comprehensive roadmap is needed – a vision of what the final jigsaw puzzle looks like, and a path to get there. Not only to fit the pieces together and fill the gaps, but to make unequivocal that abolition is the goal. This is the only approach that can generate the needed willingness to compromise and avoid paralysing conditionalities and trade-offs. Without the intellectual, moral and political weight of abolition as the credible and clear goal of the nuclear weapon states, and real movement on disarmament, the NPT is at risk of unravelling after next year's 5-yearly Review Conference of the Treaty, and a cascade of actual and incipient nuclear weapons proliferation could be expected to follow.

Thankfully, a very much more positive atmosphere prevailed at this year's NPT Preparatory Committee meeting, which concluded in New York last week. The US indicated it wanted to again be engaged seriously with the rest of the world through UN processes, honour past commitments, and get to work. For the first time, a Review Conference agenda was agreed. While final consensus recommendations could not be agreed, the first draft included commencing negotiations on a convention or framework of agreements to achieve global

nuclear disarmament, and to engage the ‘elephants outside the room’ – Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons will require not only existing arsenals to be progressively taken off alert, dismantled and destroyed, but will require stopping production of the fissile materials from which nuclear weapons can be built - separated plutonium and highly-enriched uranium, and existing stocks to be eliminated or placed under secure international control. All facilities which enrich uranium should be placed under strict international control. The nuclear industry will need dramatic change in order to become compatible with achieving and sustaining a world free of nuclear weapons.

All countries should prepare for a world free of nuclear weapons by ‘walking the talk’. My own country should reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our security policies, as we call on nuclear weapon states to do. Ensuring that we are part of the solution and not the problem also means that the international safeguards on which we depend to ensure that our uranium does not now or in the future contribute to proliferation, need substantial strengthening and universal application. Preventing proliferation, and not commercial or other interests, should always be paramount in relation to nuclear trade.

Australia’s reliance on the ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ provided by the USA should be reviewed so that Australian facilities and personnel could not contribute to possible use of nuclear weapons, and we anticipate and promote by our actions a world freed from nuclear weapons, as New Zealand has done. Erstwhile reliance on ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ by countries without their own nuclear weapons, like NATO members, Australia and Japan – must not be allowed to persist and become an obstacle to nuclear disarmament.

Achieving a nuclear-weapons free world will also be aided by reversing the staggering and unconscionable hemorrhage of material and human resources towards destructive purposes. In 2007 the world’s governments spent US$1339 billion on their militaries, a real increase of 45% in a decade. This year, US military spending – US$711 billion – exceeds the amount spent by the rest of the world combined. Best estimates indicate that 7% of current global military spending – roughly equivalent to what the US alone spends on nuclear weapons each year – invested annually for a decade, could allow the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. This would enable 500 million fewer people to live in extreme poverty, 300 million to no longer be hungry, prevent 30 million under-5 deaths and 2 million deaths of mothers in childbirth. Building real human security – reducing extreme poverty, making major reductions in preventable disease and premature death, the massive investments urgently needed to address climate change and build a sustainable energy future – will not be

possible without redirecting military resources to meet human needs and restore the environment. This kind of action and less economic and social deprivation, would lead to more stable societies, less room for conflict and, arguably, less need for nuclear weapons.

Abolishing nuclear weapons will also benefit from and makes more urgent reform and modernisation of the UN Security Council. Monopoly of permanent membership and veto power by a select group of nuclear armed states is not a tenable long-term basis for guardianship of the convention or treaties to abolish nuclear weapons.

New Zealand has been a pioneering leader in recognising that nuclear weapons threaten rather than enhance security and in dissociating itself from them and from contributing to their possible use – I commend your leadership and example, which is especially significant given the very strong popular and political support among all major parties. New Zealand has also played a leading role in promoting international disarmament efforts, such as through the New Agenda Coalition.

However, I would encourage New Zealand to continue to drive the disarmament agenda forward and not 'rest on your laurels'. Your government could demonstrate further leadership by supporting the approach advocated by the UN Secretary-General, embracing and championing the comprehensive approach to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament embodied in a nuclear weapons convention, and work with other like-minded states and civil society towards commencement of negotiations on such a convention. A realistic goal would be for such negotiations to get underway with a target date no later than the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Australia and New Zealand should cooperate more closely, including with neighbouring Pacific island and Southeast Asian countries, to this end.

Another area Australia and New Zealand could usefully work together on is strengthening the South Pacific Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. It is more than 20 years since the Rarotonga Treaty entered into force, and an ongoing process among the member states to review and strengthen the treaty could be developed. Measures for consideration to strengthen the treaty include extending the zone to cover all weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction, including chemical and biological weapons; strengthening mechanisms to monitor and verify compliance with the Treaty; establishing a secretariat to support and strengthen the treaty, such as exists in Latin America; addressing environmental monitoring and clean-up of former nuclear test sites and other areas radioactively contaminated by nuclear weapons development. Australia and New Zealand could convene a conference of signatory states to review the treaty, and lead cooperation among the existing

nuclear weapons free zones in the Southern Hemisphere, with the aim of establishing a Southern Hemisphere nuclear weapons free zone.

As President Obama noted last month in Prague, small countries can play a pivotal role in world events. I would like in closing to honour an important contribution which highlights that this applies to New Zealand and New Zealanders. It was magistrate Harold Evans who first proposed that the International Court of Justice be asked to rule on the legal status of nuclear weapons. It was his persistence and that of other New Zealanders that spawned the World Court Project, which through the World Health Assembly and the United National General Assembly resulted in the largest case ever conducted by the Court, culminating in its landmark 1996 Advisory Opinion. The judges held that any use of nuclear weapons would be contrary to international humanitarian law, and that: "There 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." All of us have a vital stake and role in helping to create a world free of nuclear weapons. Again in the words of President Obama: "We can", and this achievement will help us enormously to address the many other serious challenges we face in building real human and planetary security and sustainability.

I thank you.

Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser, Former Prime Minister Australia