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Working for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons – What can United Nations and Civil Society Do?

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Disarmament Demilitarisation Development Democracy
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1. Introduction

Thank you Liz Coates and UNA Sheffield for inviting me here today to speak on an important and timely topic “Working for a world free of nuclear weapons – what can the United Nations and civil society do?” Few years back, I had the privilege to come to Sheffield and give a talk hosted by Campaign Against Arms Trade. So it is nice to be back again.

Thank you for all the good work being done by your organisation on an ongoing basis. It is an opportunity to be among peace campaigners. You are the thinkers and change makers, and your passion is behind all the social change in our world.

In my presentation, I will argue that nuclear weapons have no utility and that any security issues they are purported to solve would only be made worse by their use. There is no serious problem on which military action may be needed which cannot be solved through the use of peaceful dialogue and diplomacy.

2. Threats posed by nuclear weapons

Trident is Britain's nuclear weapons system. It is made up of three parts: the warheads - which are the explosive 'bombs', the missiles which carry them, and the submarines which carry the missiles. The submarines are made at Barrow-in-Furness, refitted at Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth, and maintained at Faslane in Scotland. The missiles are leased from the US. The warheads are made at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and are stored at Faslane.

One of the submarines remains on patrol at all times and each submarine carries an estimated twelve missiles, each of which can carry up to four warheads – 48 in total. Each warhead has an explosive power of up to 100 kilotons of conventional high explosive.

This is 8 times the power of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, killing an estimated 240,000 people from blast and radiation.

The case against trident is that nuclear weapons has no legitimate purpose, they are illegal, do not solve any of the real security threats i.e. terrorism and they are morally wrong. There is widespread public opposition to the replacement of trident. The key factor being that the cost of replacement will be now over £100 billion and the opportunity costs it presents for spending in more socially useful areas such as health, education and jobs.

Besides trident, we will be also be discussing bigger nuclear proliferation issues which require new proposals and viable solutions. It needs a new mindset. As Albert Einstein said, *“The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.”*

There are 30,000 nuclear warheads in the possession of the declared nuclear weapon states USA, Russia, France, UK and China (the P5 states) with their arsenals on hair-trigger alert.

There is worldwide proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology which is being deployed by countries such as India, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and Israel.

The development of mini nukes and bunker buster bombs by US and its doctrine of pre-emption which has replaced arm control and collective security have made the world a far less secure and stable place. It also gives wrong signals to other countries as they feel vulnerable to attack.

However, especially in the P5 states, the view is common that nuclear weapons from the first wave of proliferation somehow are tolerable, while such weapons in the hands of additional states are viewed as dangerous.

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. Nuclear accidents, effects of radiation and damage to the environment pose grave threats to our world. As recently witnessed, in Fukushima nuclear plant accident whose radioactive fallout has spread as far as California waters, whose ill effects are unforeseen will be borne by Japanese for long time to come.

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the terrifying hallmark of which was the nuclear arms race and the doctrine of mutual assured destruction continue to exist. Their existence poses the greatest threat to the human race and the planetary environment.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence is contagious, making non-proliferation more difficult and raising new risks that nuclear weapons will be used. The world remains concerned about nuclear activities in North Korea, India, Pakistan and Iran.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditures last year exceeded \$1.6 trillion. Ten years ago, the Brookings Institution published a study that estimated the total costs of nuclear weapons in the United States alone to be over \$5.8 trillion, including future cleanup costs. By any definition, this is a huge investment that could have had many other productive uses, i.e. eradicating hunger, poverty, diseases and the adverse effects of climate change.

The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded. Military spending continues to rise and more high tech weapons are being increasingly produced. They are flooding markets around the world. They are destabilising societies. They feed the flames of civil wars and terror. Around the world, gun violence is the number one cause of civilian casualties.

Concerns over nuclear weapons' costs and inherent dangers have led to a global outpouring of ideas to breathe new life into nuclear disarmament. We have seen the WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) commission led by Hans Blix, the New Agenda Coalition, and Norway's Seven Nation Initiative. Australia and Japan have launched the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. Civil society groups and nuclear-weapon states have also made proposals, such as nuclear weapons convention which should be followed for general and complete disarmament.

3. Five steps the United Nations can take for disarmament and a nuclear free world

States make the key decisions where nuclear weapons are concerned. But the UN has important role to play. It provides a central forum in which states can agree on norms to serve their common interests. It analyses, educates, and advocates in the pursuit of agreed goals.

To push forward the agenda, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, put forward a five-point proposal.

▪ Disarmament must enhance security

First, to urge all NPT parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon states, to fulfill their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament. They could agree on a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments. Or they could consider negotiating a nuclear-weapons convention, backed by a strong verification system, as has long been proposed at the UN. A draft has been circulated to all UN members of such a convention, which offers a good point of departure.

The nuclear powers should actively engage with other states on this issue at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The Security Council's permanent members should begin discussions on security issues in the nuclear disarmament process. They could unambiguously assure non-nuclear-weapon states that they will not be subject to the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons. The council could also convene a summit on nuclear disarmament. Non-NPT states should freeze their own nuclear-weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments.

▪ Disarmament must be reliably verified

Secondly, governments should also invest more in verification research and development. The United Kingdom's proposal to host a conference of nuclear-weapon states on verification is a concrete step in the right direction.

The NPT state parties should pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament, either through a new convention or through a series of mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a credible system of verification.

▪ Disarmament must be rooted in legal obligations

Thirdly, Universal membership in multilateral treaties is a key, as are regional nuclear free zones and a new treaty on fissile materials.

Unilateral moratoria on nuclear tests and the production of fissile materials can go only so far. We need new efforts to bring the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty into force, and

for the conference on disarmament to begin negotiations on a fissile material treaty immediately, without preconditions.

There should be efforts made to support the creation of the Central Asian and African nuclear-weapon-free zones which should also strongly support efforts to establish such a zone in the Middle East. And all NPT parties need to conclude their safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and voluntarily to adopt the strengthened safeguards under the Additional Protocol.

Furthermore, an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice in 1996 stated 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."*

▪ **Disarmament must be visible to the public**

Fourthly, countries with nuclear weapons should publish more information about what they are doing about what they are doing to fulfill their disarmament agenda.

The nuclear-weapon states often circulate descriptions of what they are doing to pursue these goals. But these accounts seldom reach the public. The nuclear-weapon states should send such material to the UN Secretariat, and to encourage its wider dissemination. The lack of an authoritative estimate of the total number of nuclear weapons attests to the need for greater transparency.

▪ **Disarmament must anticipate emerging dangers from other weapons**

A number of complementary measures are needed. These include eliminating other types of WMD; new efforts against WMD terrorism; limits on the production and trade in conventional arms; and new weapons bans, including of missiles and space weapons.

If there is real, verified progress on disarmament, the ability to eliminate the nuclear threat will grow exponentially. As we progressively eliminate the world's deadliest weapons and their components, we will make it harder to execute WMD terrorist attacks. WMD should not stand for weapons of Mass Destruction but for We Must Disarm.

These proposals offer a fresh start not only on disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy, the three pillars of NPT, but also on strengthening our system of international peace and security leading to nuclear free world.

These can be enhanced by following the Article VI of the NPT which obliges its signatories *"to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control"*.

4. What can civil society do?

Follow 13 Practical Steps for Disarmament which is reaffirmation that the ultimate objective of the efforts of States in the disarmament process is general and complete disarmament under effective international control. (see end of the speech)

Here is a list of action points – things that we can all do to oppose nuclear weapons and promote a nuclear weapons world:

- Before anything – study the problem.
- Write to your MP, key decision makers and government ministers.
- Write letters to world leaders and the editor of newspapers.
- Educate the public and hold meetings and run workshops.
- Call a radio talk show.
- Contact your local interfaith group to discuss the issue.
- Make paper cranes to send to decision makers (they have become a symbol of disarmament).
- Join the nonviolent initiatives for disarmament groups like Uniting for Peace, CND or UNA.
- Attend a “Dialogue with decision-makers” workshop.
- Promote complete and general disarmament by distributing information about 13 Practical Steps taken from the final document of 2000 Review Conference of the (NPT) Nuclear-non Proliferation Treaty. (see appendices to lecture).
- Pray. The nuclear weapons danger cannot be addressed through action alone. All activism must be accompanied by an inner journey that faces the existence of nuclear weapons, the possibility of annihilation, and the power of God in the face of these threats. Religious people can be a voice of hope for the future.
- Speak truth to power. Our elected officials are the ones who are making the daily decisions to fund new nuclear weapons or to follow our treaty obligations by reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons. Build a relationship with your local and national elected officials by writing letters, making phone calls, and setting up in-state lobby visits.

5. Conclusion

For total and general disarmament, education should be made a priority for bringing a culture of peace, nonviolence and reconciliation. By eliminating root causes of war we can eliminate the need for small arms and nuclear weapons leading to lasting peace. The world today spends billions preparing for war. Should we not spend a billion or two preparing for peace? The reduction of defence budgets and demilitarisation should be applied to fund the economic aid and conflict resolution.

One of the sustainable long term solutions for elimination of nuclear weapons will be the prohibition of weapon usable nuclear materials. By signing the FMCT (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty) Treaty, we can prevent nuclear proliferation by limiting the available sources and hence increasing physical safety and security.

The United Kingdom and the other nuclear powers have to recognise that not only Trident is illegal under the international law but their own weapons and policies are part of the problem and hinder global efforts to abolish nuclear weapons and reduce proliferation incentives. Now is the time to begin phasing out nuclear weapons, starting with a decision not to replace Trident. Contrary to myth, giving up nuclear weapons will not happen overnight or leave the United Kingdom naked and vulnerable. It is high time to recognise their irrelevance and start planning for a safely managed transition to a more relevant security approach, with a more appropriate allocation of defence resources.

Governments of the world are facing economic turmoil and financial crisis. In the days of economic hardship for the people why governments should spend money on weapon systems like Trident replacement which will cost the UK economy over \$100 billion while there is huge unemployment including healthcare and education services are being squeezed.

There was some good news when President Barack Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev sign the 2010 USA-Russia Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in Prague, START limits each state's strategic nuclear forces to 1550 warheads and 800 missiles and bombers (only 700 deployed). Satellite monitoring and on-site inspection will ensure verification. While the Peace Movement wanted lower limits, and although neither power envisages nuclear abolition in the foreseeable future, START is certainly a significant disarmament agreement (ratified by US Congress and Russian Duma December 2010/January 2011). It boosts global security, increases trust between USA and Russia which could lead to further arms control, strengthens the NPT regime (and the case against Trident renewal), and reduces the risks of accidental nuclear war.

Among other decisions, two positive things came out of 2010 NPT conference in New York. a) Delegates agreed to hold a conference in 2012 to explore the possibility of Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Middle East. b) They also agreed on an action plan to initiate a process leading to negotiations on nuclear weapons convention that will compulsorily ban nuclear weapons for everyone.

I will close with a paragraph from Nobel Laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, director of IAEA:

“Imagine what would happen if the nations of the world spent as much on development as on building the machines of war. Imagine a world where every human being would live in freedom and dignity. Imagine a world in which we would shed the same tears when a child dies in Darfur or Vancouver. Imagine a world where we would settle our differences through diplomacy and dialogue and not through bombs or bullets. Imagine if the only nuclear weapons remaining were the relics in our museums. Imagine the legacy we could leave to our children. Imagine that such a world is within our grasp.”

If we can follow his wisdom and all the outline initiatives we have discussed today, then we have a golden opportunity to achieve a world free of nuclear arms.

Thanks for listening

13 Practical steps

EXCERPTED FROM THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE 2000 NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE

The Conference agrees on the following practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and paragraphs 3 and 4 (c) of the 1995

Decision on "Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament":

1. The importance and urgency of signatures and ratifications, without delay and without conditions and in accordance with constitutional processes, to achieve the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.
2. A moratorium on nuclear-weapon-test explosions or any other nuclear explosions pending entry into force of that Treaty.
3. The necessity of negotiations in the Conference on / Disarmament on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in accordance with the statement of the Special Coordinator in 1995 and the mandate contained therein, taking into consideration both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives. The Conference on Disarmament is urged to agree on a programme of work which includes the immediate commencement of negotiations on such a treaty with a view to their conclusion within five years.
4. The necessity of establishing in the Conference on Disarmament an appropriate subsidiary body with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament. The Conference on Disarmament is urged to agree on a programme of work which includes the immediate establishment of such a body.
5. The principle of irreversibility to apply to nuclear disarmament, nuclear and other related arms control and reduction measures.
6. An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed under Article VI.
7. The early entry into force and full implementation of START II and the conclusion of START III as soon as possible while preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability and as a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons, in accordance with its provisions.
8. The completion and implementation of the Trilateral Initiative between the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

9. Steps by all the nuclear-weapon States leading to nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all:

- * Further efforts by the nuclear-weapon States to reduce their nuclear arsenals unilaterally.

- * Increased transparency by the nuclear-weapon States with regard to the nuclear weapons capabilities and the implementation of agreements pursuant to Article VI and as a voluntary confidence-building measure to support further progress on nuclear disarmament.

- * The further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons, based on unilateral initiatives and as an integral part of the nuclear arms reduction and disarmament process.

- * Concrete agreed measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems.

- * A diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination.

- * The engagement as soon as appropriate of all the nuclear-weapon States in the process leading to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons.

10. Arrangements by all nuclear-weapon States to place, as soon as practicable, fissile material designated by each of them as no longer required for military purposes under IAEA or other relevant international verification and arrangements for the disposition of such material for peaceful purposes, to ensure that such material remains permanently outside of military programmes.

11. Reaffirmation that the ultimate objective of the efforts of States in the disarmament process is general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

12. Regular reports, within the framework of the NPT strengthened review process, by all States parties on the implementation of Article VI and paragraph 4 (c) of the 1995 Decision on "Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament", and recalling the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 8 July 1996.

13. The further development of the verification capabilities that will be required to provide assurance of compliance with nuclear disarmament agreements for the achievement and maintenance of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Notes

The following publications were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

- 1) Ban Ki Moon, “Five steps to a nuclear-free world” (Guardian, UK) 23 November 2008
- 2) Penn State Live, Ambassador to address U.S. foreign policy, nuclear disarmament, 6 February 2009. <http://live.psu.edu/story/37444>
- 3) Vijay Mehta, “Should Britain be building new nuclear weapons? What are its implications and what is the peace movement’s strategy?” 1 June 2006
- 4) CND Briefings on Trident, www.cnduk.org

This speech can be downloaded from www.unitingforpeace.com

Vijay Mehta is president of Mehta Centre (www.vmpeace.org), Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity (www.fortuneforum.org), Chair of Uniting for Peace (Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign). He is an author and global activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment. Some of his notable books are The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future, Arms No More, and The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century.

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.

The Sunday Times described him as a ‘longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment’, who along with his daughter, Renu Mehta, has set a precedent for striving to change the world. (The Sunday Times, 1 February 2009). Vijay Mehta’s new book **“The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels Wars and Poverty in the Developing World”** will be published by Pluto Press later in early 2012.