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NUCLEAR WEAPONS: GOOD NEWS, BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH

The Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy welcomes two recent developments concerning nuclear weapons: the New START agreement signed April 8 and the final communiqué of the Nuclear Security Summit issued in Washington yesterday. Taken together with certain aspects of the Nuclear Posture Review Report released April 6, they signal a renewed interest by the United States and the world community in dealing with a problem which, failing a solution, could have catastrophic consequences, but which, from time to time, takes a back seat to other concerns.

New START will reduce the limit on US and Russian deployed strategic nuclear weapons from 2200 to 1550 each (in fact more due to a counting rule). It strains credulity to imagine that either country would ever have occasion to use that number, or a much smaller one.

The Nuclear Posture Review pays lip service to the "long-term" goal of a nuclear weapons free world. But its only steps in that direction are the initiation of a national research effort on how to achieve this goal and a reference to a "future effort," to be deferred until after further US-Russian reductions, to "engage" other states with nuclear weapons in a "multilateral effort" to reduce and "eventually eliminate" the weapons worldwide. What is needed is the commencement of international negotiations with a view to drafting a convention eliminating all nuclear weapons, similar to those already in existence for chemical and biological weapons.

The Nuclear Security Summit reached useful agreements on such matters as securing nuclear materials that could be used in nuclear explosives within four years, strengthening security at nuclear facilities, and reducing the amount of bomb-usable highly enriched uranium in use and circulation. But, given the presence in Washington of 49 governments, most represented by heads of state, it missed a unique opportunity to make a start on ridding the world of nuclear weapons altogether.

The next act in this nuclear ballet will be the four-week Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference convening at the United Nations in New York on May 3. Civil society will use that occasion to remind the delegates from many countries that, since each nuclear weapon state, whether inside or outside the NPT, seems determined to maintain its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent against every other such state, the vision of a nuclear weapons free world will remain a chimera so long as the elimination of all nuclear

weapons is not approached in a universal mode, as required by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of 1996.

The Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy is an educational association of lawyers and legal scholars engaged in research and advocacy in support of the global elimination of nuclear weapons. An [analysis](#) of the Nuclear Posture Review by John Burroughs and other relevant materials are at www.lcnp.org.