

# The Challenge of Nuclear Abolition

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I would like to lay out for you a number of simple propositions:

1. *A nuclear weapons free world (NFWW) requires a universal enforceable treaty or convention.* In principle, this objective could also be achieved by other means; for instance, the gradual elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals through a series of partial unilateral, bilateral or multilateral agreements; or the eventual incapacitation of these arsenals over time through their becoming inoperative; or their voluntary transfer to a central repository charged with their destruction. None of these, or possibly other, alternatives, however, has the slightest chance of success and talk about them is merely a diversion from the central objective. As Ban Ki-moon has said, the draft prepared by IALANA, IPPNW and INES would be a good starting point on the road to a nuclear weapons convention.
2. *Don't be fooled by politicians declaring their commitment to a NFWW.* Everybody is for an eventual or ultimate abolition of all nuclear weapons. But think what these words mean. "Eventual" suggests the occurrence of an event, or series of events, as a condition for another event to occur. What could that be, in this case? Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace? Or the invention of a weapon more efficacious and less costly than the nuclear? Similarly with "ultimate", which suggests something far away and definitely not around the corner? In medieval geography Ultima Thule was the name of a place located beyond the borders of the known world. When we confront diplomats of nuclear weapon states with the question "when will we see abolition?" we are told "not yet" or "the time is not ripe" or "the conditions are not present." Hillary Clinton, in a speech in the State Department last year said we would arrive at a NFWW "in some century." Not good enough, Ms Clinton. To borrow from a slogan of the anti-Vietnam war movement: What do we want? Abolition. When do we want it? Now.
3. *As reaffirmed in last year's Vancouver Declaration, the nuclear weapon states are in violation of their good faith obligation to take steps to bring about a NFWW within a reasonable time.* Civil society must do everything in its power to make them comply with it. Thirteen years have elapsed since the International Court of Justice unanimously decreed the existence of this obligation. It is time to return to the court for its revalidation. The court's opinion of July 8 1996, proclaiming the existence of an obligation for complete nuclear disarmament, was a tremendous shot in the arm for the anti-nuclear weapons movement. Since then, a kind of ICJ-fatigue has set in. Some say it would take too much work to go back to the court and others that, the composition of the court having changed, it might issue an unfavorable opinion. To which I reply: Yes, it would take a lot of work, but that is what we are here for. And yes, a favorable opinion cannot be guaranteed, any more than when we first went to the Hague. But it is unlikely that, given the evidence of scandalous delay and hypocrisy which could be laid before the court, it would declare that the nuclear weapon states are in full compliance with their obligation. In any case, the mere undertaking of a return to the court, accompanied now as it was then by a major organizational effort, would have the effect of

invigorating our movement, as well as bringing some pressure to bear on the recalcitrant nuclear weapon states. It would at the very least inject, or reinject, law as an element in the discussion of nuclear policy.

4. *The existence of nuclear weapons has been a major, if not the major, source of war in the contemporary world.* We need to highlight this fact in our work and use documents like the Ahrweiler Declaration to do so. Just as opponents of gun control claim that they are motivated by concern for “security”, although all the evidence points the other way, so the advocates of nuclear weapons would have us believe that these engines of megadeath have “kept the peace”, while precisely the opposite is the case. Would there have been an Iraq war, with more than 4000 Allied soldiers killed and more than 30,000 injured, as well as several hundred thousand Iraqi civilians killed and injured, if the information about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, eventually exposed as erroneous, had not served as pretext for the war? Right now, the air is full of talk about catastrophic consequences if Iran’s nuclear facilities are destroyed or not destroyed, depending on which side of the question the speakers are on. Could Israel’s presumed raid on Syria’s fledgling nuclear installation have led to war between the two countries? Why not? Which country or group within a country will next embark on a nuclear weapons project, inviting military action by another country or group of countries to nip it in the bud? It is too late to build defenses against the elephant invading the china shop. The elephant is already in the shop.
5. *Nuclear energy and nuclear weapons are joined at the hip. The surgery needed to separate them has not been invented.* The NPT triad, nonproliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy, is a prescription for disaster. It was designed before Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima and at a time when the developing world was lulled into believing that nuclear energy was a cheap and safe way to catch up economically with the developed, and partly nuclear-powered, world. But nuclear power is neither cheap nor safe and any country possessing uranium or plutonium for peaceful purposes may sooner or later give in, overtly or covertly, to the temptation to produce weapons grade fissile material and nuclear weapons. The nuclear summits, like the one recently held in Seoul, never talk about this. They are portrayed as making the world safe *from* nuclear energy. In reality they are making the world safe *for* nuclear energy. However, in exposing the dangers of nuclear energy to the developing world, we must support its legitimate demand for alternative sources of energy. Instead of making it into a sorcerer’s apprentice, we must propound a vision of a universal partnership devoted to clean, affordable and safe energy.

There you have it. If we make these five principles the framework of our endeavors and if we manage to build a critical mass of civil society and governmental advocates of a world free of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, will we be able to meet the challenge of abolition? Perhaps not. But we will not be guilty of abandoning the task. More we cannot do.