

7. Youth Statement

Convenors: Felix Grädler, International Law Campaign

Speakers: Natalie Wasley, International Peace Pilgrimage and Tina Keim, NPT Youth Action

Ambassador Duarte, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the youth of the world, we want to thank you and the NGO community for inviting us to speak at this conference dealing with topics vital to the future of our world.

We speak to you as representatives of a group of young people from many nations who are themselves representatives of the generations that will inherit the consequences of the decisions you make this month. Because we are young, we tend not to be influenced by the politics of war, religion and economic interests, but we are intelligent, articulate and far-sighted. We have been taught to think critically and defend our rights to free speech, free thought, and the right to protest. We speak to you today of that which **must** happen to ensure a safe, clean environment for generations to come. We are interested primarily in protecting the common future of humanity.

Why? Because we ARE the future. We will inherit the legacy of your generation, and because you are discussing matters that may be more important to us than to you, as we will continue to live on this earth after you are gone, we want to communicate our concerns to you, the representatives of the States parties to the NPT. We want you to know our wishes and demands for the future, our future, and the world of today's youth.

Whatever you discuss during the following weeks, whatever fine points you may argue or agree about, please keep in mind the first goal stated in the preamble to the UN Charter. According to that document, your primary obligation is to save future generations from the scourge of war. In this light, we tell you frankly that we do not understand how you can ensure peace and protect us without eliminating the most dangerous weapons ever created by humankind.

Unfortunately, we are forced to discover over and over again that the moral values conveyed to us at school, at home, in books and in the media are not subscribed to by those walking the corridors of power. It seems that democratic values, taught to us as sacrosanct, are meaningless in the international community.

The primary organ for the regulation of international conflict and the creation of peace is dominated by the fifteen members of the UN Security Council, five of which are permanent and have the right of veto. These five are the declared nuclear-weapon States. On this basis, – if the US, Russia, Britain, China and France continue to have a veto – it appears that the NPT bargain will never be fulfilled. We recommend that the Security Council be reformed to reflect the equality of all people and maintain a democratic process and commitment to justice.

Long-standing nuclear weapons States, such as the US, are adopting new doctrines that support proliferation. They are planning new nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, more countries are pursuing the nuclear option. Nuclear arsenals around the world are being developed in defiance of the disarmament obligations enshrined in the NPT. Recently, the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change warned that, "We are approaching a point at which the erosion of the nuclear regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation".

Don't you see it is time to breakthrough the obvious deadlock the Conference on Disarmament has been in for years and to start negotiating a nuclear weapons convention?

We are sure that this step would open an enormous door to a much deeper and more peaceful understanding among our nations. As a first step, you could clearly demand the implementation of the 13 steps you agreed upon 5 years ago and set up a body mandated to control the implementation of nuclear disarmament.

Even better would be adoption of the only plan that includes a concrete timetable and a concrete date by which all nuclear weapons should be abolished – the 2020 Vision Campaign of the Mayors for Peace.

We ask you: What do you intend to turn over to us, the next generation? Will you give us a world in which disarmament exists on paper while billions are spent to develop the ultimate in war technology and the means of mass murder? Will you give us nations that, while deploying and developing their own nuclear weapons, are quick to go to war when enemies appear to be obtaining similar weapons? Or will you give us a world united under a common constitution that limits military armaments and eliminates entirely the possibility of nuclear holocaust? Will you be able to explain your choice in good conscience to your children and grandchildren?

Can you explain to us how a tiny minority is able to completely block negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention? How can it be that this minority is made up of governments that claim to champion democratic values?

We are taught in school that the foundation of a functioning community is the acceptance of the rule of law by every member. In reality, we see how the mighty and powerful arbitrarily break international law in pursuit of their national interests. What would happen to a citizen who refused to obey valid laws or interpreted them only to suit their own interest? What would you say if contracts you signed were not taken seriously? This is the behaviour we see continually at the international level.

The highest judicial institution on the international level, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, declared in 1996 that there IS a binding obligation to disarm and abolish nuclear weapons enshrined in international law, and that nuclear weapons ARE illegal!!! How is it possible that you, the highest representatives of the world's population, are not following the laws and rules you made yourselves during the last 50 years with the intention of bringing order and justice to world politics?

If you fail to take concrete steps towards a nuclear-weapon free world, how will you answer for burdening us with such a horrifying menace? You are charged with making this decision. If you fail to act, how will you look into your own mirror?

We, the youth of this world, are willing to learn from the mistakes of the past. We want a future of strong nations bound by mutual respect and international law. And international law demands a nuclear-weapon free world! If you do not give us such a world, we may never have the chance to create it ourselves.

That is why we call on you here and now to tolerate no longer the most terrible and vicious human-made threat to the future of our world. You must do this now, before it is too late. You must begin the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Do it for us, for your children and for all following generations, as a vital step toward a more secure, and peaceful future.

We call on you: Remember again and again the preamble to the UN Charter, which all members of the UN have signed! The most important of your tasks, obligations and responsibilities is established there: to preserve future generations from the scourge of war. But this is not possible if you bequeath to us a world full of nuclear weapons.

We demand, in the name of all the children of our one world, the immediate, unqualified, total abolition of all nuclear weapons for the well-being of humankind and our common future.

We are ready to step forward to a more peaceful and secure world for the sake of our common future!
Are you ready to join us?