

**NGO Statement to First Committee, 23 October 2009**  
**Operationalising the vision of a nuclear weapon free world**

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*This statement was drafted by several non-government organisations that closely follow the work of First Committee, including the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy; the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches; the Global Security Institute; the Federation of American Scientists; the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy; Nuclear Age Peace Foundation; Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament; Western States Legal Foundation; and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.*

For more than sixty years, civil society has been calling on governments to take action to prohibit and eliminate all nuclear weapons. US President Obama's pledge in Prague to seek "a world free of nuclear weapons" brought the hope of billions of people to the highest levels of international responsibility.

We have chosen in this statement not to comment in detail on specific resolutions that the First Committee has before it, but to talk about how nuclear disarmament interconnects with other weapons and security challenges in today's complex security environment and to put forward a few concrete ideas toward operationalising the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

First, some interconnections.

At the DPI/NGO conference in Mexico City in September, 1300 participants representing over 340 NGOs from more than 55 countries endorsed a final declaration recognising that security, peace, disarmament, human rights, gender equality, and development are closely interconnected at the local national, regional, and global levels.

One important element underscoring all of these issues is military spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditure in 2008 is estimated to have totaled \$1464 billion. This represents an increase of 45 per cent in the past ten years. The US military expenditure has reached the highest level in real terms since World War II. It is now responsible for at least 40 per cent of total global military spending.

Nuclear weapons, and the wider global military-industrial complex, consume vast resources that could be put to better use.

Consider just one example. The head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat Yvo De Boer estimated recently that the annual cost of cutting global emissions of greenhouse gases will be \$200 billion. It will cost another US\$100 billion per year to cope with the effects of climate change. This means that just one-fifth of annual global military spending budget can help reduce the scale and worldwide consequences of climate change.

Nuclear weapons cannot help us address climate change, poverty, child mortality, or injustice. Instead, they act as an existential threat to humanity and life on this planet. They also maintain the structural inequalities between the nuclear-armed powers and the great majority of states, and incite some states to seek nuclear weapons. They support establishments and institutions that see their interests as being well served by a mode of military dominance ultimately underwritten by nuclear weapons. They do not provide security for the citizens of the world.

Civil society groups and many states have long recognised the need to develop more effective resources and tools for security, defence, and conflict resolution than weapons. We advocate pursuit of human security, through the advancement of the interconnected issues above. However, none of the interconnecting issues should be treated as preconditions for nuclear disarmament. In fact, there is no basis for demanding general and complete disarmament or a settlement of all regional disputes as preconditions for eliminating nuclear weapons. The pursuit of nuclear disarmament and achievement of a legally-binding regime that eliminates and prohibits nuclear weapons will greatly facilitate global security and efforts to build peace.

Which leads us to a few suggestions on how to operationalise the vision for a world free of nuclear weapons.

There are many resolutions before you on various aspects of nuclear weapons. We join in supporting many of these efforts, including bringing the CTBT into force, reinforcing the existing nuclear weapon free zones and promoting the establishment of additional zones in Europe and the Arctic as well as the Middle East and North-East Asia, reducing and eliminating strategic and non-strategic arsenals, and fulfilling the NPT disarmament commitments undertaken in 1995 and 2000.

The common factor preventing progress on all these issues is that some governments continue to place high value on nuclear weapons, whether for security, status, or power projection.

When leaders come to the UN General Assembly and Security Council and say they want a nuclear weapon free world, we have to ask how they are changing their policies and doctrines to make this possible. The most conducive path to such a world is for all of the nuclear weapon states to marginalise the role of nuclear weapons in concrete ways, such as by:

- agreeing to legally-binding security assurances not to attack non-nuclear weapon states with nuclear weapons;
- committing not to use nuclear weapons as a tool for “pre-emptive strike”;
- rejecting counterforce and countervalue doctrines; and
- excluding “extended deterrence” arrangements in their doctrines;
- declaring that as a matter of national policy they will not design, develop, or produce new design nuclear warheads or modernise existing warheads.

Trading some arms control agreements or arsenal reduction for modernised nuclear weapons research and production facilities capable of building the nuclear threat anew is not disarmament. If the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process. The “nuclear danger” does not come from without, but from within. To seek to “hedge” against the nuclear threat only perpetuates it,

sustaining the global climate of fear and distrust that makes real disarmament progress always a receding goal.

To this end, it is good that the United States and Russian Federation have returned to the negotiating table to replace START. The NPT Review Conference should include commitment to further bilateral reductions. In the next round, the United States and Russian Federation should each cut their deployed and stored nuclear weapons and delivery systems to at least the low hundreds. This would facilitate multilateral negotiations on elimination. They should also cut their nuclear weapon budgets in half and commit to zero funding for any modernisation or refurbishment programmes.

Furthermore, it is important not to be mesmerised by negotiations, which can be derailed by domestic or international developments. The United States and Russia, and other states with nuclear weapons, can and should undertake unilateral reductions, as the 13 Practical Steps provide.

Many non-nuclear weapon states also have a role to play. Thirty non-nuclear weapon states shelter under the US nuclear umbrella. Citizens in NATO countries, Australia, South Korea, and Japan have long advocated for their countries to let go of the cold war nuclear umbrellas and forge more independent and balanced relationships for national, regional, and international security. Now key legislators from all these countries are joining the call. We urge governments to heed these calls and act to denuclearise their alliances and relations with other states. Many proponents of retaining nuclear weapons in the United States espouse “extended deterrence” as their justification. Public statements from governments under the US nuclear umbrella stating that they believe their security commitments will still be viable without nuclear weapons would thus remove a key obstacle to deeper reductions in the US nuclear arsenal. Removing nuclear sharing from NATO’s Strategic Concept, combined with removal of nuclear weapons from Europe, would be an important confidence-building measure and would likely facilitate bilateral dialogue that could lead to much deeper cuts in the US and Russian nuclear arsenals.

Like many of you, we welcomed that the UN Security Council held a special session this September on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. While Resolution 1887 included concrete operational commitments to help prevent nuclear proliferation and other kinds of nuclear insecurity, it failed to include similarly concrete measures to advance disarmament. Disarmament cannot take a back seat to non-proliferation, nor can measures undertaken to prevent proliferation be considered acts of disarmament.

We hope that the cooperation forged among the P5 in the drafting of this resolution will continue and grow to engage non-nuclear weapon states, and that the P5 and other nuclear weapon possessors will find similar unity of purpose in implementing specific disarmament measures.

To this end, all states interested in serious nuclear disarmament should, *inter alia*:

- Oppose conditioning approval of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on deals for entrenching and expanding weapons complexes, on retaining the option of designing and manufacturing modified or new-design warheads, or on modernizing delivery systems. They should also call for the closure of all nuclear test sites.

- Negotiate for a fissile materials treaty that comprehensively prevents use of existing materials outside military programs for weapons acquisition and that facilitates disarmament.
- Immediately and forcefully convey to nuclear weapon possessors that they must reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines and in international relations.
- Support UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call, in his five-point plan for nuclear disarmament, for the possession of any weapon of mass destruction to be considered a 'global taboo'.
- Emphasise that it would be a crime against humanity if anyone were to use nuclear weapons, anywhere in the world, for any purpose whatsoever. In this context, we applaud the decision of the International Committee of the Red Cross to speak out on nuclear weapons during this First Committee session.
- Commit to the objective of a Nuclear Weapons Convention and begin the process that will lead towards this objective. Those that are states parties to the NPT should put this commitment into their statements and papers to the 2010 Review Conference and push for it to be included in any final documents.

Civil society experts developed a model Nuclear Weapons Convention some years ago as a resource and guide, with suggestions and options for how to prohibit, reduce, and eliminate nuclear weapons safely and securely, while providing insurance against future break-outs. This model Convention has been circulated by the Secretary-General as an official UN document.

There are some who say that it is premature to consider a Nuclear Weapons Convention at this time. Work on a Nuclear Weapons Convention will ensure full implementation of the NPT and help facilitate nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation steps.

Abolishing nuclear weapons will help move the world away from a system of competing nation-states seeking military advantage and open the way to putting real, equitable, environmentally sustainable, human security interests at the centre of national policies.

Victor Hugo wrote that: "More powerful than the march of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come." The idea whose time has come is that the abolition of nuclear weapons is not only desirable, but possible, achievable, practical, and urgently necessary.