Faslane statement -January 7, 2007

By Professor Sir Richard Jolly

The following is a paper presented by Sir Richard Jolly during an 'academic blockade' that was staged at the United Kingdom submarine Base in Faslane Scotland on January 7, 2007. The protest was spurred by British policy to renew the Trident nuclear weapons system. According to Sir Richard's personal account: "[there were] 70 or 80 academics and students present, excellent papers presented, respectful behavior throughout, not too much rain and after lunch, a record setting blockade which closed the Faslane North Gate for about six hours...for three hours some 15 papers were presented on the sidewalk, with loudspeakers so all the 80 participants, and even the police could hear. There were academics from Sweden, Netherlands, the US and a physicist from Japan - as well as students from Oxford, Cambridge, Sussex, Edinburgh and Sweden. Each speaker stuck to the 10 minute guideline (in part because we suggested that the police arrest any speaker who went over the limit!)." -ed.

My cousin and namesake, Richard Jolly was in the Royal Navy. In September 1939, as Commander of the Destroyer HMS Mohawk, he was attacked by German aircraft while bringing his ship to the Firth of Forth. Though fatally wounded, he refused to be treated for his wounds. Instead he remained on deck, directing operations and navigating his ship for five miles from a deckchair until the Mohawk was safely in its berth. Only after the main engines had been rung off did he collapse and die. He was one of the first naval casualties of the Second World War and was awarded the Military Medal of the Order of the British Empire.

I am proud of my cousin. The Second World War was a war that had to be fought - at least once Hitler had been allowed to re-arm and to embark on his evil course of conquest, destruction and genocide. If the Treaty of Versailles had been more even handed - less punitive in its reparations, as Keynes argued - or if Britain and the other powers had lived up to their collective commitment to prevent the rise of Hitler, as Churchill had called for in the early 1930s, the Second World War might never have been necessary fought. But politicians in power did not take the actions required and the Second World War became necessary.

Quite the reverse is true today. Politicians are arming themselves with nuclear weapons that cannot be used - but which nonetheless exist as a stockpile of death.

["Don't use such wild language," some proponents will say. But have these proponents forgotten the appalling destruction wrought by nuclear weapons on the two occasions when they were used - in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? "Ah," will be the reply, "our weapons are for defense, not for use." Not for use - or will not be used? As Robert McNamara has said, "Possession of nuclear weapons involves serious risks that they will be used - if not by intention, by miscalculation, misjudgment or other human error."
But, I can hear the defenders and the proponents reply, "That was the United States. Britain would not make such miscalculations or misjudgments."
After Iraq, it is impossible to sustain such a view.]

I am here today because I am convinced that nuclear weapons are useless, expensive and destructive on a vast and most deadly scale. The facts are stark. Nuclear weapons will do nothing to prevent further war and they will be useless in the event that Britain or any other powers are drawn into fighting. If they are used they will wreak
unimaginable havoc and destruction. I believe therefore that Britain should embark on a serious process of nuclear disarmament, using all its power, influence, alliances and diplomatic skills to persuade others to join in the process. This, after all, is what the Non Proliferation Treaty commits us to. The issue is not whether replacing Trident is illegal under the NPT. Rather it is how Britain can strengthen its commitment to the NPT and, with others, restore momentum to it, as the UN Secretary General appealed to all countries to do in 2005.

In this brief statement, I want to make three key points:

1. Nuclear weapons have no military purpose today. These are the words of Lord Mountbatten, Admiral of the Fleet, who said this shortly before he died in 1979. It is the view of an increasing number of senior military staff and advisers, some of whom I will quote.

2. Possession of nuclear weapons involves a serious risk that they will be used - if not by intention, by miscalculation, misjudgment or other human error. Robert McNamara has set out these risks in his recent film, Fog of War. He pointed out that during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 we were "that close, that close" to nuclear conflagration.

3. Maintaining nuclear weapons, or worse, renewing them and updating the submarines that carry them, adds to Britain's already high military spending. It seriously diverts from the resources needed for tackling the real insecurities in the world today, let alone for meeting other national priorities.

Nuclear weapons have no military purpose.

Many people think that those who oppose nuclear weapons are all wild-eyed radicals, opposed to everything military. On the contrary. Many of the world's most senior and experienced military leaders have serious doubts about nuclear weapons. Many others, including some of the world's most eminent scientists, have warned many times about the deadly dangers of possessing nuclear weapons.

In front of these gates to Faslane, it is only proper to quote Lord Mountbatten, Admiral of the Fleet and uncle to Prince Charles. In 1979, he said this:

"As a military man who has given half a century of active service, I say in all sincerity that the nuclear arms race has no purpose. Wars cannot be fought with nuclear weapons. Their existence only adds to our perils because of the illusions they have generated." 1

General Charles A Horner, Chief of Staff of the US Space Command, stated in 1994: "The nuclear weapon is obsolete. I want to get rid of them all." 2

A former US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Larry Welch, said, "Nuclear deterrence depended on someone believing that you would commit an act totally irrational if done." 3

Robert McNamara, US secretary for defense for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, reflected on the lessons - and tragedy, his word - of Vietnam and of Cuba. He concluded some ten years ago that "more and more Western military and civilian security experts have expressed doubts about the military utility of nuclear weapons." 4

What happens if nuclear weapons are used?
There is a real risk that we underestimate the horrors and devastation of nuclear weapons being used and causing deaths and destruction on an almost unimaginable scale. Each of the UK's four submarines carries the equivalent of 1500 times the bomb released in Hiroshima. We are apt to forget the vast destruction and horrifying realities of even that one nuclear weapon of relatively low yield. This is how a Japanese journalist described the scene in Hiroshima.  

"Suddenly a glaring whitish, pinkish light appeared in the sky accompanied by an unnatural tremor which was followed almost immediately by a wave of suffocating heat and a wind which swept everything in its path. Within a few seconds, the thousands of people in the streets in the center of the town were scorched by a wave of searing heat. Many were killed instantly; others lay writhing on the ground screaming in agony from the intolerable pain of their burns. Everything standing upright in the way of the blast - walls, houses, factories, and other buildings - was annihilated…Hiroshima had ceased to exist."  

Carl Sagan, the distinguished American physicist, in his own appeal for nuclear disarmament summarized the phenomenal technological advance of the last century. Sagan said:

"Each of the technological triumphs advanced the art of mass murder by a factor of a thousand. From Gettysburg - where 51,000 were killed - to the blockbuster, a thousand times more explosive energy, from the blockbuster to the atomic bomb, a thousand times more, from the atomic bomb to the hydrogen bomb, a thousand times still more. A thousand times a thousand, times a thousand is a billion; in less than one century, our most fearful weapon has become a billion times more deadly. But we have not become a billion times wiser in the generations that stretch from Gettysburg to us."  

The economic challenge: What else might be done with £20 to £40 billion pounds?

President of the United States, General Eisenhower, supreme allied commander in World War II, put the basic economic issues with sharp clarity:

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in a final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

Eisenhower - hardly a wild-eyed radical - went on to warn about the industrial-military complex. He also underlined the vital importance of working towards disarmament.

"Disarmament is a continuing imperative. The risks of disarmament are as nothing compared to the risks of doing nothing, to sitting on your hands."

Today, our threats are those of human insecurity - of political and economic instability, of injustice that generates terrorism and stirs civil wars within countries. There are other immediate threats to our human security like epidemic diseases, global warming, urban crime and gender violence. All these need priority attention and they need resources for prevention and control. They need police, and sometimes military force, internationally and nationally. The UN is involved in action to deal with all of them.

Do nuclear weapons have any place in responding to these threats? No, they do not. Far from nuclear weapons in
any way helping to tackle these threats or reduce them, nuclear weapons add to risks and insecurities and divert resources from other much more useful and important activities.

In spite of the changing nature of our security needs, the US and some other countries - including Britain - have started increasing military spending again, after a period of 8 to 10 years of reducing military spending following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Britain now spends nearly 3 percent of national income on the military, more than all other countries except for the United States. Indeed as a share of income, Britain spends more than France and more than double Germany and Japan, and 50% more than 13 other industrialized countries of Europe. On the Trident system alone, Britain already spends about £1.7 billion a year, about 5% of its total military budget and about one quarter of what it spends on all forms of development assistance to developing countries.

So why spend £20 to £40 billion pounds more on renewing Trident submarines? And what might be some of the alternative uses of these resources?

If this money is to be spent on international security, it would be far better spent restoring momentum to the NPT, the Non Proliferation Treaty, on which the UK is in a position to give a lead. International security would also be greatly helped by more support for international activities by the UN, especially to help remove instabilities, extremes of inequality and other issues that stir the sense of deep injustice in the Middle East.

There could even be spare change for improvements at home. A government that closes maternity wards while building nuclear submarines is choosing death over life.

I would put some other activities high on my list of priorities:
- Support for peacekeeping activities of the UN. These have legitimacy, already established in countries where the UN is welcomed and the burden is shared.
- Support for non-government groups, including academics and researchers, to encourage peace education, including better understanding of the NPT and building popular support for its implementation.
- Support for NGOs and others in the media to make films about the realities and dangers of nuclear war - and what would follow from the use of even a single nuclear weapon.
- Support for other national and international actions towards strengthening human security.

Britain's policy should be to implement fully the NPT, reduce our nuclear weapons and build momentum for an international process of ridding the world of all nuclear weapons. Our policy should NOT be to assume their continuation and start on a process of modernizing them. For all these reasons, I strongly oppose spending money on the renewal of the submarines to carry the Trident nuclear warheads.

Sir Richard Jolly is Senior Research Fellow and Co-Director of the UN Intellectual History Project, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York.

Footnotes:

3 Ibid, p. 345.
6 This was quoted by Lord Mountbatten in the speech included in Apocalypse Now?, footnote 1.
7 Carl Sagan, Professor of Physical Sciences and Director of the laboratory of Planetary Studies at Cornell University said this at Gettysburg in 1988, on the 125th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, as part of an appeal for nuclear disarmament. Cited in William Safire, Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, (W. W. Norton, New York) 1992: p 625.
8 £20 billion is the official government estimate of the costs of renewing the Trident system. I have treated this as a minimum estimate and have used £40 billion as a higher estimate over the long run, to allow for cost over-runs, related costs not yet included and some inflation.

Economists for Peace and Security

http://www.epsusa.org