New Openings for Nuclear Abolition
Alice Slater

Recent calls by former cold war leaders, Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, Sam Nunn and William Perry, for new US commitments for the elimination of nuclear weapons, as well as promising statements from the Presidential candidates to address this issue if elected, have created a new opening for civil society to urge new action for nuclear abolition. We've been pushing our luck for more than 60 years since the first and only two atomic bombs to be used in war were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than 214,000 people in the initial days, and causing numerous cases of cancers, mutations and birth defects in their radioactive aftermath, new incidences of which are still being documented today. During these sixty years of the nuclear age, every site worldwide involved in the mining, milling, production and fabrication of uranium, for either war or for “peace,” has left a lethal legacy of radioactive waste, illness, and damage to our very genetic heritage. Bomb and reactor-created plutonium stays toxic for more than 250,000 years and we still haven’t figured out how to safely contain it.

To genuinely address nuclear proliferation and avoid a tragic repetition of Hiroshima, it's clear that we must eliminate not only the bombs but the nuclear power reactors that too often serve as bomb factories for metastasizing nuclear weapons states, as we’ve seen with India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea and possibly Iran, which, if it isn't yet committed to manufacturing nuclear weapons, is certainly doing all it can to ensure its bomb-making capacity with enrichment capability. The US deal with India, driven by mindless commercial interests, to sell it civilian nuclear technology (despite India’s failure to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty which forbids such sales to non-NPT parties) has shattered the NPT bargain and opened the floodgates to a host of new proliferators. Indeed, futile calls to “control” the fuel cycle have stimulated a rush of new countries to seek “peaceful” nuclear technology including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. On the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, Gorbachev called for the phasing out of nuclear power and the establishment of a $50 billion solar fund. Germany has completed preliminary meetings to launch an initiative in 2009 for an International Renewable Energy Agency. This is eminently worthy of support as it will enable us to phase out nuclear power, thereby denying its lethal radioactive by-products to would-be weapons proliferators, by relying on safe, carbon-free and healthful solar, wind, geothermal and marine energy. (www.irena.org.)

There are 27,000 nuclear bombs on the planet today, 26,000 of which are in the US and Russia; the remaining 1,000 located in the seven other nuclear weapons states: UK, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. To make progress on nuclear abolition, the US and Russia will have to cut their enormous stockpiles as part of a call to all nations to begin negotiations on a treaty for nuclear disarmament. Putin called on Clinton for the US to join Russia in cutting their nuclear arsenals to 1,500 or even 1,000 provided the US would forego its National Missile Defense (NMD) program and maintain the strategic stability of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Astonishingly, US diplomatic "talking points" leaked by Russia to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists revealed that the Clinton Administration was urging the Russians that they had nothing to fear from its proposed NMD as long as Russia kept 2,500 weapons in their arsenal at launch-on-warning, hair-trigger alert. Rather than seriously entertain Putin's offer for deep cuts, the US assured Russia that if they kept 2,500 warheads Russia would be able to overcome its NMD shield and deliver an "annihilating" counterattack! Gorbachev tried to convince Reagan to abolish all nuclear weapons but rescinded his offer because Reagan wouldn't agree to give up Star Wars and keep
weapons out of space. China repeatedly calls in the UN for negotiations to begin on a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons. In June 2006, Putin called again for negotiations on new reductions.

The US response to these initiatives has been appalling. It has rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and continues to develop new nuclear weapons in its Stockpile Stewardship program, currently funded at $9 billion for 2009. The US pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty while pressing to plant its missile and radar bases right under Russia’s nose in Poland and the Czech Republic, despite promises given to Gorbachev when the wall came down that, if he didn’t object to a reunified Germany joining NATO, NATO would not be expanded.

Each year, the UN General Assembly adopts a resolution on a space weapons ban by an overwhelming majority in which every country in the world votes in favor of negotiating a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space – except for the US, which has voted “NO” for the past three years, and Israel, which has abstained. In 2008, Russia and China, which have always been strong supporters of such a treaty, submitted a draft space weapons ban treaty at the UN Conference on Disarmament, which was dismissed out of hand by the US, characterizing the offer to make peace in space as “a diplomatic ploy by the two nations to gain a military advantage.” It should thus come as no surprise to learn that only this October Russia test fired a new intercontinental Topol missile and vowed to commission a new generation of weapons for its armed forces, while China experimented earlier this year with anti-satellite weaponry in space. To effectively seize the opportunities to move towards nuclear disarmament, the US must forego its hegemonic efforts to dominate the military use of space or it will fail to find willing negotiating partners. When threatened by US space domination, nations that cannot compete in space are more likely to rely on the possession of nuclear weapons as a way to level the playing field.

Civil Society has produced a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, drafted by lawyers, scientists and policy makers in the Abolition 2000 Global Network for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, which is now an official UN document. Repeated resolutions at the UN have supported the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention and, last year at the UN First Committee, 127 nations passed a resolution calling for “multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat or use of nuclear weapons and providing for their elimination.” The Model Nuclear Weapons Convention lays out all the steps for disarmament, including how to proceed with dismantlement, verification, guarding and monitoring the disassembled arsenals and missiles to ensure that we will all be secure from nuclear break-out. Civil Society networks including Abolition 2000 and the Mayors for Peace, led by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are calling for a new commitment at the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference for negotiations to begin in 2010 on the Nuclear Weapons Convention, laying out a timetable for abolition by 2020. It’s not as if we don’t know how to do it! The world has already negotiated comprehensive global treaties to ban biological and chemical weapons as well as landmines.

So here’s the plan:
• Take the Russians up on their offer to cut our arsenals to 1000 warheads and then take China up on its offer calling for all the other nuclear weapons states (UK, France, Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea) to negotiate a treaty for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.
• De-alert all nuclear weapons, reducing their readiness to be fired.
• Commit to never be the first to use a nuclear weapon.
• Cut all funding for new nuclear weapons research and substitute a passive custodial program for maintenance of
the arsenal during dismantlement.

- Stop all research, design and development of nuclear weapons by any means.
- Close the Nevada test site just as France and China have closed theirs in the South Pacific and Gobi Desert.
- Bring all US nuclear warheads back from Europe and abandon NATO policy to rely on nuclear weapons for its security.
- Stop the expansion of NATO.
- Accept Russia’s and China’s offers for negotiations to maintain the peaceful use of space for all time.
- Stop any further nuclearization and militarization of space.
- Support negotiations for a missile ban treaty.
- Institute a moratorium on uranium mining.
- Call for a global phase-out of nuclear power and join Germany’s initiative to fund and establish the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to promote the use of clean, safe energy.
- Support global efforts for the reallocation of world-wide subsidies of $250 billion now going to nuclear, fossil and industrial biomass fuels to be used for clean, safe, sustainable solar, wind, geothermal and marine energy; and work for the reallocation of $40 billion of US subsidies and tax breaks now supporting unsustainable energy resources to be applied to clean, safe energy.
- Reallocate the resources saved to redress the environmental devastation and human suffering caused by nuclear mining, milling, production and testing, which have been disproportionately borne by the world's indigenous peoples.
- Provide adequate resources to address the toxic legacy of the nuclear age.

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