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**A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONVENTION:
THE TRUE PATH TO NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION**

Statement by Jody Williams, Chair, Nobel Women's Initiative
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In October of 1986, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, Iceland where they seriously discussed the elimination of nuclear weapons. It was a moment of mind-boggling possibility. It was a moment of promise that could have changed our world forever. It was a moment for bold leadership. And it was a moment lost.

But I, like many, many others, believe that we are at a critical and promising moment again – perhaps we could call it a new “Reykjavik moment.” Or the “Promise of Prague.” But in either case, this is a moment of immense possibility that can and must succeed.

Since those Reagan-Gorbachev talks so many years ago, the world has been charting a dangerous nuclear course. We have witnessed nuclear proliferation and the threat of more. We are now confronted with a real possibility of nuclear materials falling into the hands of armed non-state actors who would not hesitate to use them.

These new realities have been a wake up call to the world and over the past couple of years, there has been increased fervor over renewed possibilities of nuclear disarmament. In April of last year, we heard the Prague Promise of a future free of nuclear weapons. This was followed by an unprecedented meeting last September, chaired by a U.S. President at the United Nations, to discuss nuclear weapons.

Since then we have witnessed the successful conclusion of negotiations of a new START agreement between the United States and Russia, and the signing of that treaty-- again in Prague--this April. And less than a week after that, 47 heads of state met in Washington, DC for a nuclear summit in the lead-up to this very important Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty now underway here in New York.

We welcome and embrace the increased attention to and talk about nuclear weapons and a world free of these unconscionable weapons of mass destruction. After all, opinion polls conducted in 21 countries in 2008 found that an estimated 76% of people around the world—including majorities in the

nuclear states--support the idea of a binding, verifiable nuclear weapons convention.

If this does not demonstrate to governments that they have a clear popular mandate to begin serious negotiations now, what will it take? If the nuclear states ignore the will of the overwhelming majority of people around the world, I worry what that means for our collective future.

Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the people of this planet have been in thrall to those few nations who all too literally hold our very existence in their nuclear hands. There have been moments of great hope--Reykjavik--and moments of horrific fear--the Cuban Missile Crisis. After the NPT Review Conference of 2005, the nuclear future looked dismal. Now, with new possibilities again palpable, we cannot and we must not let this moment pass.

The states gathered here in New York can seize this opportunity and change our future forever. With brave vision and even bolder action, the Promise of Prague can be transformed into the reality of nuclear abolition. This will not happen with rousing rhetoric or nuclear legerdemain. This will happen with a clear and honest assessment of the progress made and the challenges remaining in the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Now, some 40 years after its entry into force, are states--and the peoples of the world that they represent--satisfied that the NPT is being properly

implemented and complied with? Is proliferation truly being held in check? Are the nuclear states honestly and actively working toward the elimination of their own weapons as mandated by the Treaty? If the weapons potential of nuclear power is not clearly tackled can we ever really be free of the nuclear threat?

In 1997 with successful negotiation of the Mine Ban Treaty and then again in 2008 with the Cluster Munition Convention, the world recognized that *total elimination* was the only way to ensure non-use and non-proliferation of those conventional weapons that by their very nature undeniably posed too grave a danger to civilians. Even earlier, with the Chemical Weapons Convention, states recognized that *total elimination* was the only viable approach for a weapon of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons are not—nor can they be allowed to be—the exception.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations suffer no illusion that the journey to nuclear abolition will be easy, but we do know that it must begin now. Those few who hold our collective fate in their hands must respond to the collective will of the billions they allege to protect with nuclear weapons we do not want. It is time for all governments to come together—with the support of civil society around the world—to chart our course to a nuclear free future by beginning the negotiation of a comprehensive treaty banning the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. **Now.** Not in years or decades. **Now.**

Whenever there has been an effort to eliminate a weapon, there have been many who resisted the change. In some cases, some argued for “better regulations” to clarify the “responsible use” of a particular weapon. In others, it was argued that such negotiations were “premature” – as some insist now in relation to a nuclear weapons convention.

The arguments against banning antipersonnel landmines, cluster bombs and chemical weapons were specious. It is specious now to maintain that it is premature to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons--creations of such heinous violence that they almost defy the imagination. Specious arguments can and must be challenged and overcome. Governments can change their positions seemingly in a heartbeat. Particularly in response to collective pressure by civil society. Such change has happened before and it can happen now. It is a matter of recognizing the humanitarian costs and then generating sufficient political will.

Calling for the appropriate treaty is the normal and obvious way to proceed in order to generate the necessary political will and momentum to achieve a weapons ban. After all, that is why we have a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, a Cluster Munition Convention, a Mine Ban Treaty and a Chemical Weapons Convention.

We could start now to push to eliminate nuclear weapons by outlawing their use altogether. The International Court of Justice could declare their use

to be a crime against humanity. Let's not forget that the use of chemical weapons was banned before the comprehensive treaty was finally negotiated many years later. In other words, it has been done before with other weapons of mass destruction. It can be done again with nuclear weapons.

Even if begun today, the difficult and complex negotiations for a total ban of nuclear weapons would take time. Even if a Nuclear Weapons Convention were successfully negotiated in a relatively short period, the process of eliminating all the nuclear weapons in the world today would take time. And the world does not have the luxury of too much more time.

Charting this new course could be undertaken by like-minded states or by the UN General Assembly – or it could be launched here and now out of this NPT Review Conference. States could begin the process of negotiating a nuclear weapons convention now. After all, it certainly is not a new idea. Nor is it the simply the “noise” generated by civil society and non-governmental organizations.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon included a call for a nuclear weapons convention in the first point of his five-point plan on nuclear disarmament, in which he urged all states to fulfill their longstanding obligation to disarm. Each year, more than 120 states in the UN General Assembly vote in favor of a resolution on the illegality of nuclear weapons which calls for the commencement of negotiations leading to the early conclusion of a nuclear

weapons convention.

The beginning of a process to ban nuclear weapons does not mean that other measures would be neglected. Over the lengthy period of negotiation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, for example, the United States and Russia also bilaterally negotiated concerning their large stockpiles. Preparation for, and negotiation of, a nuclear weapons convention can proceed in parallel with, and inform and stimulate, negotiation and implementation of other measures.

In closing, I must strongly underscore again that the seemingly impossible can happen. But it will take a global partnership. It will take the determination and commitment of governments, UN agencies and civil society alike. But it can be done. It must be done.

The experiences of the earlier ban conventions are instructive. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines was successful beyond our wildest expectations. In fact, among my very first trips to promote the Campaign, I came here to New York to try to talk with governments about banning antipersonnel landmines. In those days, I was lucky if anyone at an Embassy would even answer my calls. It seemed a cold and unforgiving world.

But we took an issue that at the time was called a “utopian dream” and with commitment and determination and true grit created enough political pressure around the world to get governments to begin to take unilateral steps

to deal with the landmine problem. Those individual state actions provided the necessary momentum to build sufficient political will so that governments that believed in the ban and civil society organizations became strong partners in the process that gave the world the Mine Ban Treaty. A very similar process resulted in the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

That work has been called “micro-disarmament” by some, and not always as a compliment. There is absolutely no question that abolishing nuclear weapons is a far more daunting enterprise. Yet a nuclear free world is **not** an impossible goal. It is **not** the utopian dream of those who do not understand the harsh realities of the world. In fact, we understand those realities all too well – which is why we want a nuclear weapons convention now.

We listen to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and can picture a horror that no human being should ever have to suffer again. We think about continued nuclear proliferation and the fear and instability that such proliferation foretells. The all-too-real possibility of armed non-state actors getting their hands on nuclear weapons and using them is nothing but terrifying. But “nuclear deterrence” surely does not underpin their strategies.

These scenarios are not the wild thinking of fuzzyheaded peaceniks contemplating futures full of beautiful rainbows and peace doves all the while trying to conjure them up while singing “Kumbaya.” They are the stark and

clear-headed understanding of the nuclear state of play in the world today. They are extremely harsh realities that we are determined to overcome with the total elimination of the use, production, trade and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Civil society will work in open partnership—as we did in the landmine and cluster munition ban movements—with states that show real and daring leadership by launching a process now to begin the difficult work of negotiating a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The Reykjavik moment was lost – at our peril. We cannot squander the promise of the past few years. We must not squander the Promise of Prague. We do not have the luxury of time. The world cannot wait for change. It must come now. And each and every one of us has a part to play in transforming the possibility of a **nuclear-free world** into reality **now**. Not eventually, but **now**.

THANK YOU.