

9 September 2009

**Message of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
to the 62nd Annual DPI/NGO Conference on Peace and Disarmament**

In the last days of my presidency of the General Assembly, I regret that I cannot join you personally at the 62nd DPI/Conference in Mexico City. There are few issues that I feel more strongly about than total nuclear disarmament and I recognize that this is a propitious moment to express my support to your longstanding efforts to attain the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

One month ago today in Nagasaki, I joined the victims and their families of the first and only nuclear attacks in 1945. After sixty-four years, the gruesome reality of atomic destruction has lost none of its power to inspire grief and terror, as well as shame and righteous anger.

The “grand bargain” that took the form of a global Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT, which entered into force in 1970, has provided the central institutional framework for global cooperation on nuclear arms control and disarmament for nearly four decades now.

During the last ten years, however, that framework has been nearly moribund. But the determined activism of civil society organizations, and especially many of you gathered today in Mexico City, helped preserve and then revitalize public demands for complete and final abolition of nuclear weapons.

This movement is so powerful and broad-based that the Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2008 U.S. presidential elections both declared that it would be their intention to make elimination of nuclear weapons the explicit policy of the U.S. government. On April 5 of this year, President Barack Obama, fulfilled that commitment by declaring in a speech delivered in Prague: “I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”

The rise of public demand, and now elite political support, for “global zero” is not the end of the story, but only, possibly, the beginning. The U.S., the Russian Federation and other nuclear powers have already responded concretely to the new opportunities. The door has opened and we all have a profound obligation to explore its possibilities and exploit the options it presents for achieving nuclear disarmament.

So how shall we proceed?

In my judgment, any new approach to achieving “global zero” based on the NPT framework must address some very profound deficiencies of credibility and legitimacy surrounding the NPT process, or risk being portrayed, accurately in my opinion, as old wine in new bottles.

I want to propose four important lines of action that can help demonstrate convincingly that the world has indeed committed to complete and final elimination of nuclear weapons:

First, it is vitally important to set an early date for achieving disarmament, along with a clear, realistic timetable, and to work hard and be seen to work hard to achieve it. I strongly support the 2020 deadline proposed by the Mayors for Peace in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two cities that have experienced the obscenity and atrocity of nuclear attacks.

The year 2020 will be the 75th anniversary of the terrible destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and also the 50th anniversary of the NPT. Eleven years is not too little to demonstrate real commitment and real progress, even if it should turn out that full achievement of the end goal proves to be somewhat beyond our reach in that time. We can have realistic, time-bound interim benchmarks, against which the world community must hold all – not just some – nuclear powers accountable.

Second, it is essential that we begin work on the large new problems that call for attention once we take seriously the goal of achieving complete elimination of nuclear weapons, not for a brief moment, but forever. This requires that experts as well as negotiators address for the first time the technical and political issues of disarming below minimal thresholds to zero, and also begin serious analysis of what will be required to establish an effective international regime in support of global abolition.

This work needs to begin at once, in a setting that guarantees transparency and inclusiveness for all interested parties, meaning, at a minimum, all 192 Member States plus observers in the United Nations. An international commission of experts, with scientists, economists, and others experienced in the handling and tracking of nuclear materials should be convened to provide an objective foundation for the policy decisions that need to be made. Among other subjects, the commission could draw upon existing knowledge to assess what full international control of the nuclear fuel cycle would look like in practical terms, how intrusive it would need to be, how reliable it might be under alternative scenarios, and how much it would cost. Surprisingly, these questions appear never to have been seriously examined by an international body.

Third, all nuclear weapons “haves,” including those outside the NPT regime, should begin to build credibility and enhance the legitimacy of the international non-proliferation regime by placing their own enrichment and weapons programs under international monitoring and inspection regimes. This step is indispensable if we are going to manage nuclear rivalries in the short run and persuade countries like Iran that we are prepared to accept a peaceful nuclear energy program, but not a weapons programme.

Finally, to achieve legitimacy and enhance effectiveness, the whole process needs to be brought fully into the United Nations system, where it truly belongs. It is possible, and highly desirable, to have private efforts, independent scientific inquiry, bilateral and other non-UN initiatives, but there should be a strong presumption that the findings of all such efforts should be made available to all nation-states through UN agencies, and the UN’s organizations should be strengthened to be able to engage as a peer with any governmental agency.

It is my personal intention, as my term here at the United Nations draws to a close, to join with you from my cherished Nicaragua in your extraordinary campaign to bring a sense of moral responsibility, hope, commitment, common sense, reason and the power of many hundreds of thousands of collaborators all over the world. Let us take heart and, for humanity, for our dear Mother Earth, for peace and development, to move the ideal of a world free of nuclear weapons from the realm of dream to concrete reality.

Thank you.