

53rd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs
Advancing Human Security: The Role of Technology and Politics

Halifax and Pugwash, Nova Scotia, Canada
17-21 July 2003

Statement of the Pugwash Council
22 July 2003, Halifax, Nova Scotia

The Pugwash Council, meeting during the 53rd Pugwash Conference held in Halifax and Pugwash, Nova Scotia, is extremely concerned that the dangers posed by nuclear weapons are increasing the risk of a nuclear catastrophe. Widening cracks in the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the deadlock in nuclear arms control, renewed interest in nuclear war-fighting strategies, inadequate measures to control and dispose of fissile materials, the near term deployment of missile defenses and the prospect of weapons in space, all point to the very real possibility of nuclear weapons being used, whether in conflict, by miscalculation or accident, or by terrorists.

Of equal concern to the Council, and directly related to the militarization of global affairs spawned by the so-called 'war on terrorism,' are the marginalization of international institutions, especially the United Nations, the diversion of resources away from meeting challenges to global sustainability, and a weakening of fundamental civil liberties and basic human security protections. The illegality under international law of the war on Iraq, and the disdain of the US administration for seeking security through multilateral mechanisms, are an indication of the serious challenges faced by the international community in commonly protecting human security.

The world today must acknowledge, confront, and overcome the current paralysis engendered by 'the banality of nuclear weapons.' In the same way that a 'banality of evil' made possible the holocaust of the Final Solution, so now has public acquiescence to the continued primacy of nuclear weapons in world affairs, almost 60 years after their catastrophic effects were demonstrated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, made more likely a nuclear holocaust.

The world's peoples will not, of course, be directly responsible for such a catastrophe if it happens, but they will be its primary victims. Those responsible will be the leaders of countries who have failed to recognize that nuclear weapons represent the single, largest danger to the security of the international community.

Primary among these is the current US administration, which has abdicated its moral responsibility as the world's strongest power in not taking the lead to rid the world of nuclear weapons. To the contrary, the US administration has declared its intention of relying on nuclear weapons as a core component of US national security for the indefinite future. This and other US policies run directly counter to the full implementation of the thirteen practical steps it and other nuclear states agreed to during the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference held in 2000, as well as to its obligations under Article VI of the NPT to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Inter alia, the US administration is exploring the development of new nuclear weapons, may well resume nuclear testing, has withdrawn from the 1972 ABM Treaty and will shortly deploy missile defenses (of dubious military value), and seems committed to violating the non-weaponized environment of outer space by deploying a space weapons test-bed by 2008. Without a 180 degree reversal of US nuclear weapons policies, there is no chance of eliminating the incentives of other countries to acquire nuclear weapons and abolishing such weapons entirely.

This failure of American leadership by no means absolves a large number of other countries and governments from their failure to act decisively to eliminate the nuclear threat.

The withdrawal by North Korea from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and uncertainties over its nuclear aims is a major cause of international concern. Through urgent negotiations and international diplomacy a commonly satisfying agreement can be found between the main regional powers, in which North Korea receives security and non-aggression guarantees while renouncing in a verifiable manner, once and for all, its capability to acquire nuclear weapons.

In the Middle East, the continued existence of Israel's nuclear weapons and ambiguity over Iran's intentions regarding its nuclear infrastructure and the IAEA additional protocol complicate efforts to achieve true regional peace and stability and create a region free of weapons of mass destruction.

In South Asia, the two newest nuclear weapons states, India and Pakistan, need to resolve their longstanding conflict over Kashmir and cross-border terrorism while moving decisively to reduce the nuclear threat between them.

The other four original nuclear powers - Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China - continue to rely on nuclear weapons for deterrence despite the inherent dangers of doing so. Similarly, the members of NATO exhibit an irrational attachment to US nuclear weapons as part of NATO strategy, at a time when NATO faces no threat and can have no reason for a military strategy incorporating nuclear weapons.

In a world where many governments often emphasize exhortation over concrete action in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons, Pugwash supports the important contribution to the strengthening of the Non-Proliferation Treaty made by the New Agenda Coalition and urges even stronger dialogue between the New Agenda countries and the nuclear weapons states.

In seeking to mobilize world public opinion to demand concrete and immediate steps to reverse current developments that threaten the use of nuclear weapons, the Pugwash Council feels it imperative that global action be undertaken to exert all possible pressure on governments to act in concert to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Human security for the world's peoples is at greater and greater risk. The large majority of them continue to face unacceptable depredation in their access to water, food, health care, resources, and basic security. Intensive international cooperation, especially between industrial and developing countries, is needed to redress these imbalances, many of which contribute directly to human insecurity and conflict. As noted during the 53rd Pugwash Conference, new technologies hold out both promises and challenges in the sustainable use of resources and the use of new biotechnologies in agriculture, medicine and other fields. In all such endeavors, it is crucially important for scientists to remember their individual responsibility regarding the beneficial applications of their work in promoting true human security for all individuals.

All such improvements in the human condition, however, will be for naught if a nuclear catastrophe occurs. The world stands on the knife-edge of the nuclear dilemma. Will it myopically continue to accord nuclear weapons a primary role in world politics and face the ultimate threat of nuclear devastation, or will the global community stand up, say no, and take the necessary action to at last rid the world of the prospect of nuclear annihilation?

Between now and the 2005 NPT Review Conference, the international community has the opportunity to move decisively away from a continued and dangerous reliance on nuclear weapons. Progress toward achieving the 13 practical steps agreed to in 2000, as well as the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, accelerated reductions in US and Russian nuclear forces beyond what is called for in the May 2002 Moscow Treaty, improved accounting for and control of fissile material, reductions in tactical nuclear weapons, and solutions to regional nuclear crises, all would contribute to moving the world away from the catastrophic dangers to human security inherent in a continued misplaced reliance on nuclear weapons for national security.

The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs was founded in 1957 in the fishing village of Pugwash, Nova Scotia, and in 1995 received the Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with its co-founder and then President, Sir Joseph Rotblat, for its efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons.

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