

The 56th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs

A Region in Transition: Peace and Reform in the Middle East
11-15 November 2006, Cairo, Egypt

Conference Statement of the Pugwash Council

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For Immediate Release
18 November 2006

The Pugwash Council, meeting during the 56th Pugwash Conference held in Cairo, Egypt, from 10-15 November 2006, expresses its grave concern over the escalating violence in the Middle East, which tragically has grown more pervasive and deadly in recent months.

The war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the upward spiral of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and the violent insurgency and sectarian fighting in Iraq, have produced a humanitarian tragedy of nearly unprecedented proportions for the region, with civilians the overwhelming victims. Coupled with the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan and the continued threat posed by terrorism to regional states and the international community, the picture is bleak indeed.

Also of concern is the nuclear factor in the region - the presence of Israeli nuclear weapons and uncertainty over Iran's nuclear program. Increased tension in Northeast Asia and the recent nuclear test by the DPRK have introduced new security challenges in that part of the world.

The nuclear non-proliferation regime is under stress from other areas as well - by the failure of the NPT Review Conference in 2005, the demonstrable lack of progress by the major nuclear weapons states in reducing and eliminating their weapons, and the ever-present threat of terrorist acquisition of nuclear materials.

In a global world order skewed by the dictates of the "international war on terrorism", where unilateralism and disdain for collective security are used to trump the rule of law and multi-lateral approaches to meeting basic human security needs, the risk of conflict escalating out of control, to include the possible use of nuclear weapons, remains high.

The Urgency of the Middle East Crisis

The Pugwash Council believes immediate steps are needed to prevent even more violence that could spread throughout the region, and that the Middle East crisis must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner by the international community.

More than three years of sectarian, political and terrorist violence in Iraq have claimed at least 150,000 Iraqi lives, as well as the deaths and wounding of thousands of coalition and Iraqi military and security personnel. The decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intensifying, especially in and around Gaza, with civilians the overwhelming victims. And the 'summer war' between Israel and Lebanon witnessed the indiscriminate use of violence and weaponry against civilians, by both sides. Civilians are also suffering in the resurgence of violence in Afghanistan, and in continued sporadic outbreak of terrorist acts in the region.

The region is witnessing a massive failure of political will to deal with these inter-related crises. The Pugwash Council calls on the international community to help jump start the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, with the 2002 Arab peace initiative a positive starting point. We also urge direct talks between the United States and Iran and Syria that could lower threat perceptions and increase regional stability. In Iraq, political dialogue between the Iraqi parties is needed at the same time as foreign influences are greatly reduced. Two crucial imperatives in all these discussions will be the need to include all legitimate and duly elected parties in the talks, and the related need to avoid long-standing double standards in how all parties are treated.

Especially worrisome in a region plagued by rising religious, sectarian and political strife is the nuclear question. We urge an early resolution between the international community and Iran over that country's nuclear program and the resumption of full scope IAEA and Additional Protocol safeguards.

Pugwash continues to advocate the goal of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, while recognizing that improved regional stability and a lessening of hostile rhetoric and threat perceptions are necessary to move in that direction. In the interim, we urge those Middle East states that have not yet signed and/or ratified the Chemical and Biological Weapons conventions to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Strengthening Nuclear Non-Proliferation

The nuclear test carried out by the DPRK in October 2006 presents an additional challenge to the entire framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation regime. The Pugwash Council believes that a combination of Six-Party negotiations and direct US-DPRK talks are needed to reduce tensions in the region, provide security assurances that can reduce incentives to acquire nuclear weapons, and pave the way for the DPRK to return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as soon as possible.

Action to reinvigorate the non-proliferation regime must also be taken by the five initial nuclear-weapons states (US, Russia, UK, France and China). We call for early entry into force of the

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the start of negotiations for a verifiable Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. The Pugwash Council also recommends the following:

- The US and Russia should go well beyond the Moscow Treaty and implement deep cuts in their nuclear weapons, to levels in the hundreds, instead of the absurd number of 10,000+ weapons that currently exist in each country.
- All nuclear weapons states should move immediately to the de-alerting of their nuclear forces and the adoption of nuclear no-first-use policies.
- As the UK Trident nuclear weapons system is nearing the end of its operational life, the UK government has a unique opportunity to lead the way towards the total abolition of nuclear weapons. The Pugwash Council strongly recommends that the UK decides not to renew, renovate or replace its nuclear weapons.
- The US and NATO should complete the withdrawal of all US tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe, while Russia should greatly reduce the tactical nuclear weapons based on its territory.
- Given recent policies of the US government to more seriously investigate the feasibility of space weapons, the time is now to preserve space as a weapons-free sanctuary as we approach the 40th anniversary in 2007 of the Outer Space Treaty.
- And most urgently, there remains the need for rapid action to control and/or eliminate the still substantial stockpiles and sources of highly enriched uranium (HEU) around the world that could provide the means for a catastrophic terrorist nuclear attack.

Renewed interest in civilian nuclear power, driven by concerns over global climate change, high oil prices, and the need for diversified energy sources, brings with it serious concerns over the proliferation ramifications of building a new generation of nuclear power plants and enrichment and reprocessing facilities. Preventing plutonium-based fuel cycles is of special importance. Options for the multilateral control of nuclear fuel cycles could also help strengthen the barrier between civil and military nuclear programs.

Controversy over the proposed US-India nuclear cooperation agreement is especially instructive in this regard. While the sharing of best practices and proliferation-resistant technologies is desirable, the precedent of nuclear cooperation between an initial nuclear weapons state such as the US and a non-member of the NPT could undermine future non-proliferation efforts.

Additionally, the Pugwash Council believes that constructive work should be started by like-minded States to identify the legal, political and technical requirements for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. As recommended by the Middle Powers Initiative, these efforts would be a contribution to the NPT process and could provide the framework for eventual negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention prohibiting and eliminating such weapons.

The ultimate goal is to declare nuclear weapons illegal and immoral and move toward their total elimination. To repeat our message from the Pugwash Conference in Hiroshima in July 2005 - as long as nuclear weapons exist, they will one day be used.

An Alliance of Civilizations

Meeting in Cairo, we are acutely aware of how a concept such as the "clash of civilizations" can both over-simplify and polarize debate over international security.

Given deep religious and political fissures running through the Arab/Islamic world and the West, simplistic notions of a Manichean "clash of civilizations" prevent the emergence of vitally needed cooperative solutions for resolving the world's major political and security challenges.

As is painfully apparent by the failure of unilateral military solutions to solve what are fundamentally political problems – whether by the US and UK in Iraq or by Israel in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip – the international community needs a decisive new approach to the many long-standing issues in need of political resolution in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; stability for Lebanon; an end to the tragic political, sectarian and terrorist violence in Iraq; engagement with Syria and Iran in promoting regional security cooperation; securing Afghanistan's future in the face of the recent upsurge of Taliban-inspired violence; and generally promoting the growth of democratic governance and civil society throughout the region.

Broad promotion of human security, no less than the fight against terrorism in all its aspects, must depend on the rule of law, multilateral cooperation, the principles of equity and compromise, and respect for democratic processes. Also needed is the realization that the nation state in today's world – no matter how big and militarily powerful – can only be effective when it works through regional and international organizations and frameworks to promote the security of its citizens.

In that regard, the Pugwash Council welcomes the election of the new United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, who will take office in January 2007 and who will need renewed support from all quarters in promoting the reforms and efficiencies necessary in the UN for it to deal effectively with the broad range of security and societal challenges facing us.

These challenges, of course, extend far beyond the Middle East. From central Asia to the Far East, and throughout African and Latin America, civil and sectarian violence and instability present major challenges to the international community.

A recent major Pugwash initiative on the Kashmir conflict, for example, is one area where there is reason for hope that a transformation can occur in Indian-Pakistani relations that will reduce the likelihood of future conflict. Pugwash has also been recently involved in efforts to promote regional peacekeeping in East Africa and in strengthening the capabilities of the African Union for conflict mediation and peacekeeping.

Elsewhere, in the Caucasus and central Asia as an example, effective cooperation among regional and international organizations presents the best chance for resolving conflicts, rather than unilateral action, pre-emption, or excessive use of military force. New modes of cooperation are needed between NATO and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), as well as between the European Union and NATO, regarding potential cooperation in peace support and in any future crisis.

More broadly, genuine human security will only be possible if the international community aggressively addresses its fundamental components, most notably equitable access to food, water, healthcare, education, and economic opportunity. Given the challenges posed by global climate change and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, concerted international action and increased resources targeted on these problems are needed as well.

When judged by the objectives of the UN Millennium Development Goals announced in 2000, the tragic reality is that human security for the world's peoples is woefully deficient. The majority of world's population is confronted daily with unacceptable deprivations in their access to basic human necessities. While the promise of new technologies and the sustainable use of resources offers hope, such benefits will depend on a basic Pugwash credo; that scientists remember their responsibility regarding the beneficial applications of their work in promoting true human security for all individuals, and to carry that message to the public, governments, and international institutions.

At the 56th Pugwash Conference in Cairo, the above and other themes were addressed by speakers including: His Excellency Ahmed Abul Gheit (Foreign Minister of Egypt), Amr Mousa (Secretary General, League of Arab States) and Hamid Ansari and Aly El-Samman, who jointly gave the Dorothy Hodgkin Memorial Lecture with their conversation on Islam and the West, with a response from Alexey Vasilyev of Russia.

Conference participants also were greeted by IAEA Director General, Mohamed El Baradei, via a video message. Other conference speakers included Amb. Mohammed Shaker and Gen. (ret.) Mohamed Kadry Said of Egyptian Pugwash, and Prof. M.S. Swaminathan of India and Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino of Italy, the President and Secretary General, respectively, of Pugwash.

The conference also included a wide array of panel discussions on Middle East security, nuclear disarmament, and Kashmir (see www.pugwash.org for a full list of conference events). Pugwash is grateful to the Ford Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Embassies of Denmark and Norway, the Al-Ahram Center, and the Government of Egypt, for their support of the conference.

This 56th Pugwash Conference in Cairo was the first since the death, in August 2005, of the organization's co-founder and past President, Sir Joseph Rotblat, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Pugwash in 1995. During the conference there was a special tribute to Sir Joseph, including the screening of a short video with excerpts from the memorial meeting that was held in London in December 2005 at the Royal Society.

It is in memory of Jo's unflagging optimism and faith in humanity that the Pugwash Council calls on the governments and the peoples of the world to accept the tremendous diversity in religious faith and political persuasion that exists in the international community in order to work together constructively to resolve conflict and improve the human condition, for all.

*The 56th Pugwash Conference, **A Region in Transition: Peace and Reform in the Middle East**, was attended by more than 180 participants from over 40 countries, including 30 International Student/Young Pugwash participants, and was held at the Conrad Cairo Hotel in Cairo..*