



Remarks on a “Nuclear Free World”

By

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Seminar

A Nuclear Free World: A UN Perspective

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Let me say at the outset how pleased I am to speak with you today at Victoria University of Wellington.

My Office for Disarmament Affairs at the United Nations attaches great importance to the field of disarmament and non-proliferation education and it is always a privilege to have an opportunity to meet with students of all ages.

In some way, we are all students, because there is always something new in any field, and disarmament is surely no exception. At the UN, we are always encountering rapidly emerging developments in the world—just consider the following:

- The Syrian government and other governments reported last year that chemical weapons were used in that country—the United Nations then joined with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization and investigated these claims and confirmed that such weapons were indeed used—Syria is now participating in an international arrangement to destroy its entire chemical weapons arsenal, as well as relevant materials and facilities.
- Farther North, we have witnessed the unfolding crisis on the Crimean peninsula, which has strained relations between the Russian Federation and the United States—the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals—and hopes appear to be fading for a major new disarmament agreement between these States in the foreseeable future.
- Last year, global military spending exceeded \$1.7 trillion—that's more than \$4.6 billion in just a single day—that's almost twice the UN's regular budget for an entire year. Included are billions of dollars for modernizing nuclear weapons or their delivery systems, with plans extending decades into the future.
- It seems like almost every day a new weapon system is appearing on the horizon that is not covered by existing international treaties. The use of armed drones has been getting the big headlines, but concerns are also growing over the development of so-called autonomous weapons—what some have called “killer robots”—that are expected to be developed for use on land, sea, and air. We also see disturbing trends in nanotechnology, laser weapons, and cyber weaponry, to name a few.
- The agenda for dealing with nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has evolved widely over the years—there is a disarmament agenda focused on the global elimination of such weapons; there is a non-proliferation agenda for stopping their global spread to additional States; and there is a counter-terrorist agenda focused on preventing non-State actors from acquiring and using such weapons.

These are just some of the complex challenges we face in this business. We have to evaluate continually what we are doing, lest we find ourselves forgetting our fundamental goals and failing to assess our desired ends relative to our available means. As the adage goes, “fanaticism consists of redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.”

There is a way to prevent this from happening and I will address it today.

Now, some of my colleagues in this disarmament profession are very familiar with the term “nuclear-weapon-free” but not “nuclear free”. I imagine that some might even view the

latter as a misstatement of the former.

Well I do not know if this term “nuclear free” was coined in New Zealand, but I do know it has quite a heritage here. It appears in the title of your landmark 1987 law prohibiting your citizens or residents from manufacturing, possessing or having any control over any nuclear explosive device. The law also prohibits visits by nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed ships, while also banning the dumping of radioactive wastes.

A year earlier, New Zealand had ratified the Rarotonga Treaty, which established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone—another very significant use of this term. As has been the case with each of the world’s five regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, the Rarotonga Treaty makes it clear that while it is a regional treaty, it has a much more ambitious goal. In the words of its Preamble, the parties were (and I quote) “Convinced that all countries have an obligation to make every effort to achieve the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, the terror which they hold for humankind and the threat which they pose to life on earth.”

So it is clear that the “nuclear free” term certainly encompasses nuclear disarmament, but also several other challenges reflected in your 1987 legislation. I am sure it is also a concept that owes a considerable debt to memories of the environmental damage done by decades of nuclear tests in the Pacific and in Australia.

My task today, however, is not simply to examine the concept of a nuclear free world, but to offer a UN perspective on it. Let me emphasize that I am only able to offer one UN perspective on this since there are no doubt many different views among our Member States.

I view this concept as important for two fundamental reasons.

First, something has been going on in this country that has profound significance for the rest of the world community and in particular for countries and groups that are seeing to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

This is something that official statements, the professional literature, and the news media almost never discuss. Yet despite this silence, I believe that this particular “something” will probably have more influence on the future of nuclear disarmament than any other single factor.

What is it that will have such an impact?

My answer can be reduced to one word: congruence. This difficult word is almost never used in the discourse on disarmament, for reasons that are well beyond my understanding. It derives from the Latin word, *congruō*, which means “I meet together, I agree”. Essentially it refers to collection of ideas or objects that happen to fit together well—together, they form a complete whole. They are in harmony. Their parts agree.

When it comes to nuclear-weapons issues, New Zealand’s policies and the views of its citizens stand together as a marvelous illustration of the concept of congruence in practice.

But today I would like to discuss another dimension of congruence that is just as significant. Here in New Zealand, your domestic laws, regulations, policies, and public and civic institutions are fully consistent with your country's international commitments. This harmony stands in stark contrast to the situation in many other countries where there is essentially no such correlation.

Perhaps the clearest example of its antonym is the "incongruence" between the official policy and legal commitments of States possessing nuclear weapons—and their domestic laws, regulations, policies, and institutions for achieving disarmament. The same might be said of their nuclear allies. As Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, they have legal obligation to undertake negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament yet these have never taken place. These nuclear countries also lack plans for achieving disarmament and they do not have national budgets set aside specifically for this purpose. Furthermore, they do not have any disarmament agencies and even many of their legislatures have shown little interest in eliminating nuclear weapons globally, in contrast to the legislatures in non-nuclear-weapon States, as seen in the positive resolutions adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

To be sure, this is not the only example of incongruence in the field of disarmament. This situation occurs whenever there is tension or a fundamental contradiction between a stated global goal and facts on the ground at home. It is, of course, not at all uncommon for there to be some tension between domestic and foreign policies.

New Zealand, however, is a shining example of a country that has found a way to harmonize its various nuclear policies. In so doing, you have created a positive model for other countries to follow.

This is much more than a desirable goal. As I suggested earlier, congruence is truly indispensable to the future of nuclear disarmament.

If we are ever to move beyond merely talking about a nuclear free world—as New Zealand has defined it—to the stage of actually achieving it, we will need to see much greater evidence of congruence in the policies and practices of all States, in particular those with nuclear weapons. In time, growing diplomatic support for disarmament combined with persistent pressure from civil society stand an excellent chance of enlarging this realm of congruence.

One of the attractions of concluding a nuclear weapons convention—something that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has proposed—is that it offers a splendid opportunity to build a sturdy bridge between a global commitment and a domestic duty.

Looking ahead, I believe that the more congruent disarmament laws and policies become, the more apparent it will be both inside and outside of government that there really is no fundamental distinction between the domestic interest and the common global interest. This is certainly true with respect to nuclear weapons, because it is to everybody's benefit to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons because the world would be a safer place, future generations would be more secure, and vast resources would be liberated for use in other more productive social and economic pursuits in meeting basic human needs. As Secretary-General Ban has

often said, nuclear disarmament is a “global public good of the highest order.”

This brings me to you—this student audience. Soon you will be choosing your own careers. Some of you may decide to become involved in advancing your honourable national and international goal of a nuclear free future. I encourage you to do so, for your generation will soon inherit much of the unfinished business that my own generation—despite our best efforts—may be passing along as our legacy.

As the great 19th Century American educator, Horace Mann, once said, “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” A closer alignment between the domestic and foreign policies of States will one day offer plenty of opportunities for new victories in the field of disarmament.

This will not happen by accident or through some action by the hidden hand of history. Whether undertaken diplomatically or through domestic politics, it will require some hard work, some persistence, a refusal to be discouraged by setbacks, and an abiding willingness to join hands with others both inside and outside individual countries. By coordinating and networking, you can share your lessons learned with others and help them to overcome their own obstacles. A nuclear free world is not some utopian dream, it is within reach.

For the benefit of humanity, I wish you the very best in your efforts to achieve it.