**Remarks by Mayor T.M. Franklin Cownie of Des Moines, Iowa**

**To the International Affairs Standing Committee on 18th January, 2017**

**The 85th Winter Meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors Washington, DC**

At the national level, the only thing we know for sure is that we’ll be facing great uncertainty for the foreseeable future. For mayors, it’s more important than ever that we clarify what’s important to us and what we stand for.

At our 2016 Annual Meeting, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, for the 11th consecutive year, unanimously adopted a resolution calling for U.S. leadership in the elimination of nuclear weapons. **We mayors had it right, calling on the next President of the United States *– whoever it would be*, to: p**ursue new diplomatic initiatives to lower tensions with Russia and China and to dramatically reduce U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles; to participate in or initiate multilateral negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons as required by the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty; and to reduce nuclear weapons spending to the minimum necessary to assure the safety and security of the existing weapons as they await disablement and dismantlement, and to redirect those funds to address the urgent needs of cities and rebuild our nation’s crumbling infrastructure.

Today, nearly 15,000 nuclear weapons, most an order of magnitude more powerful than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, most held by the U.S. and Russia, continue to pose an intolerable threat to humanity and the biosphere.

The United States is poised to spend one trillion dollars over the next 30 years to modernize its nuclear bombs and warheads, the submarines, missiles and bombers needed to deliver them, and the infrastructure to sustain the nuclear enterprise indefinitely. The other nuclear-armed states are following suit. *And the dangers of wars among nuclear-armed states are growing*.

Tensions between the United States and Russia, have risen to levels not seen since the Cold War. In Syria, with perhaps the most complex war in history raging, the U.S., Russia and France are bombing side-by-side and on different sides.

The U.S. is facing off against China in seas where other Asian nations are contesting Chinese territorial claims**. India and Pakistan remain locked in a nuclear arms race amid mounting diplomatic tensions.** North Korea continues to conduct nuclear weapons tests and has announced its intention to test an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.

These are potential nuclear flashpoints. *This is the geopolitical reality that President Trump inherits.*

We members of Mayors for Peace, an international organization dedicated to eliminating nuclear weapons, are keenly aware that these devices were designed to wipe cities off the map. As the mayor of Des Moines, I can expect that my city is an unlikely target, but the same cannot be said for many of my counterparts. Cities around the world are utterly unprepared to respond to a catastrophe of that scale. *Prevention is the only cure.*

This is not a partisan issue. U.S. national security policy has been remarkably consistent in the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras, despite dramatically changed geopolitical conditions. The threatened use of nuclear weapons as the “cornerstone” of U.S. national security policy has been reaffirmed by *every* President, Republican or Democrat, since 1945, when President Harry Truman, a Democrat, ordered the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

According to the Trump transition website: “Mr. Trump will ensure our strategic nuclear triad is modernized to ensure it continues to be an effective deterrent…” – essentially a continuation of the Obama administration’s policy. Mr. Trump’s ominous December 22, 2016 tweet: “*The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability* until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes”, seemed to indicate an intention to double down on reliance on the nuclear threat.

While Mr. Trump’s conciliatory tone towards Russia offers a glimmer of hope for lowering tensions between the two nuclear-armed giants, the firestorm raging around assertions that Russia manipulated the U.S. election makes it impossible to predict what will happen next.

The good news is that much of the world does seem to be coming to its senses regarding nuclear weapons. In December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly voted to hold negotiations in 2017 on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, leading to their elimination. The vote represents a global repudiation of the nuclear weapons status quo by the vast majority of non-nuclear states. However, the U.S., as well as Russia, Britain, and France vociferously opposed the resolution, and it is unlikely that the nuclear-armed states will participate in the negotiations.

This is totally unacceptable. In an Open Letter to governments, Mayors for Peace called on *all* states to participate in the negotiations, noting: “Participation by the nuclear-armed states in these negotiations can provide a venue for confidence-building and constructive engagement that can contribute to de-escalation of international tensions.”

Resolutions adopted at Annual Meetings of the USCM become its official policy. (*Please read the 2016 resolution, included in your packet*.) How can we elevate and leverage the USCM’s principled consistent position on nuclear disarmament to bring the United States to the negotiating table and redirect military spending to meet human needs?

I invite you join me and 7,204 other members of Mayors for Peace in 162 countries, and help us reach our goal of 10,000 members by 2020. (*A registration form is in your packet*.) I encourage you to act in your city to raise public awareness of the humanitarian impacts and financial costs of nuclear weapons, the growing dangers of wars among nuclear-armed states, and the urgent need for good faith U.S. participation in negotiating the global elimination of nuclear weapons. And I invite you to consider traveling to Nagasaki for the next General Conference of Mayors for Peace, August 7 – 10, 2017.

Mayors are primarily responsible for public safety. When it comes to nuclear weapons, President Trump should listen to America’s mayors and let us help set sensible priorities with the aspiration that our collaboration puts the hopes, dreams and possibilities of future generations ahead of war.