

The Challenge of Disarmament: Still Nonviolence or Nonexistence

*Presentation of the Western States Legal Foundation to the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, October 16, 2015, by Andrew Lichterman, Senior Research Advisor, delivered by Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director**

As this Committee meets, the nuclear-armed countries are edging ever closer to direct military confrontation in conflict zones around the world, from Ukraine to Syria and the broader Middle East to the Western Pacific. The danger of nuclear war is growing again on a scale measured in months or years. Those who rule in the nuclear-armed states appear comfortable approaching disarmament on a time scale measured in generations—and show no interest in taking up the task again anytime soon.

In closing remarks, the chair of last year's First Committee said, "I believe that one of the most urgent messages that rang out loud and clear from the deliberations and draft resolutions of the First Committee ... is the need to revitalize the disarmament machinery, which is in danger of losing both credibility and relevance."¹ Consider the contrast between the Chair's assessment and the view on prospects for disarmament two decades ago. Then, a General Assembly resolution concerning the work of the First Committee could declare that the assembled states were "Encouraged by the changed political climate in the post-cold-war era, which is conducive to further bilateral, regional and multilateral efforts in disarmament..."²

No amount of tinkering with the disarmament machinery can turn it into a vehicle for disarmament progress when those in the driver's seat have no intention of moving forward. The new round of conflicts and confrontations, and the resumption of arms racing, are driven by those who have the power to shape policy in the nuclear-armed states. Primary responsibility for the continued scourge of industrialized warfare world-wide lies with the military-industrial complexes and national security state elites at the apex of the global war system, and those in the United States above all. Nuclear-armed states account for three quarters of global arms exports; the United States and Russia together for over half.³ They provide the kinds of weapons that turn local, low-intensity conflicts into industrial-scale wars that fragment societies, destroy vital infrastructure, and destabilize entire regions. These human catastrophes are used to justify competing armed interventions that raise the stakes even higher, with nuclear-armed militaries operating in close quarters in proxy confrontations that easily could spiral out of control. A small fraction of humanity benefits in the short run from these high stakes competitions; all of us bear the risk.

¹ Closing Remarks by H.E. Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations and Chairman of the First Committee, 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 3rd November 2014

² United Nations General Assembly, 48th Session, Resolution 48/87, Rationalization of the work of the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee), A/RES/48/87 13 January 1994.

³ Pieter D. Wezeman And Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2014," SIPRI Fact Sheet, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, March, 2015 (Table 1: The 10 largest exporters of major weapons and their main clients, 2010–14).

A civilization in which endless competition is the motor for development is approaching its limits. The quest for advantage within economies has generated immense disparities of wealth, and with it endless conflict. The project of control of the many by the few—an inescapable characteristic of a society that generates stark inequality both within and among states—has brought with it the endless perfection of state violence. The quest for advantage among states has created weapons that can destroy all states. Heedless extraction of natural resources in the service of endless wealth, and the endless state power that sustains it, threatens to destroy the ecosystems all else depends on.

Progress towards a global society that is more fair, peaceful, and ecologically sustainable is interdependent. We are unlikely to get far on any of these objectives without progress on all. They are not “preconditions” for disarmament, but, together with disarmament, are preconditions for human survival. In our relationships both with each other and the planet, we are now hard up against the choice: nonviolence or nonexistence. Our time is running out.

**This statement was drafted and coordinated by Western States Legal Foundation and has been endorsed by the following 135 organizations in 19 countries.*

INTERNATIONAL

Association of World Citizens

Global Action to Prevent War

International Association of Peace Messenger Cities

International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES)

International Peace Bureau

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Pax Christi International

Pressenza International Press Agency

Soka Gakkai International

Womens International League for Peace and Freedom

World Beyond War

World without Wars and Violence

AUSTRALIA

People for Nuclear Disarmament, Sydney

The Human Survival Project, Sydney

AUSTRIA

Internationaler Versöhnungsbund, österreichischer Zweig (Fellowship of Reconciliation)

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Landmine Survivors Initiatives

CANADA

Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, Québec

Committee for Future Generations, Northern Saskatchewan

Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Cooperative, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Les Artistes pour la Paix

PEACE-NB, Saint John, New Brunswick

Peace River Environmental Society, Alberta

Physicians for Global Survival, Ottawa

Project Ploughshares

Religions for Peace Canada

Religions pour la Paix - Québec

Saskatoon Peace Coalition, Saskatchewan

Sustainable Energy Group, Woodstock, New Brunswick

FIJI

FemLINKPACIFIC, Suva

FRANCE

Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)

Armes nucléaires STOP

GERMANY

American Voices Abroad Berlin

IALANA Germany (International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms)
Scientists for Peace

The Nuclear-Free Future Award Foundation, Munich

INDIA

Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace

Global Futures Network, Mumbai

ISRAEL

Israeli Disarmament Movement

ITALY

AIMPGN, Associazione Italiana Medicina per la Prevenzione della Guerra Nucleare (Italian Medical Association for the Prevention of Nuclear War)

Italian Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms

Beati i costruttori di pace (Blessed Are the Peacemakers)

Rete Italiana per il Disarmo (Italian Disarmament Network)

JAPAN

Hiroshima Peace Culture Village, Miyoshi, Hiroshima

Nihon Hidankyo (Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations)

Japan Council against A and H Bombs (Gensuikyo)

Peace Depot, Inc.

KENYA

Association of Physicians and Medical Workers for Social Responsibility, Nairobi

NEW ZEALAND

Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace

NIGERIA

Media Rights, Lagos

POLAND

World PeaceLab Szczecin (Polish affiliate of International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms)

SPAIN

FundiPau (Fundació per la Pau – Foundation for Peace), Barcelona

SWEDEN

Swedish Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms

Swedish Peace Council

UNITED KINGDOM

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy

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Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Hereford Peace Council

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Muslim Voice

Architects Designers Planners for Social Responsibility

CODE PINK

Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM)

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

Peace Action

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Proposition One Campaign

Roots Action.org

United for Peace and Justice

Veterans For Peace

WarIsACrime.org

Western States Legal Foundation

Womens International League for Peace and Freedom – US section

Abalone Alliance Safe Energy Clearinghouse, San Francisco, California

Brooklyn For Peace, Brooklyn, New York

Canticle Farm, Oakland, California

Christians For The Mountains, Dunmore, West Virginia

Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes, Monroe, Michigan

Code Pink NY, New York, New York

Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations, New York, New York

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Ecological Options Network, EON, Bolinas, California

Fairmont, Minnesota Peace Group, Fairmont, Minnesota

Franciscan Action Network, Washington, DC

FukushimaResponse.org, Sonoma County, California

Hibakusha Stories, New York, New York

Idle No More, San Francisco Bay

Kansas City Physicians for Social Responsibility, Kansas City, Kansas

Kateri Peace Conference, Fonda, New York

Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, New York, New York

LEPOCO Peace Center (Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern), Bethlehem Pennsylvania

Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives, Garden City, New York

Los Alamos Study Group, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Metta Center for Nonviolence, Petaluma, California

Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center, Walnut Creek, California

Multifaith Voices for Peace & Justice, Palo Alto, California

Nafsi ya Jamii (The Soul Community), Oakland, California

Nevada Desert Experience

Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force, Las Vegas, Nevada

New Jersey Peace Action

Nuclear Hotseat Podcast. Los Angeles, California

Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Takoma Park, Maryland

Nukewatch and The Progressive Foundation, Luck, Wisconsin

Oakland CAN (Community Action Network), Oakland, California

Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Office of the Americas, Santa Monica, California

Oregon PeaceWorks, Salem, Oregon

Pax Christi Long Island, Hicksville, New York

Pax Christi Metro New York

Pax Christi New Jersey

Peace Action New York State

Peace Boat US, New York, New York

Peace Resource Center of San Diego, San Diego, California

Peaceworkers, San Francisco, California

Popular Resistance, Baltimore, Maryland

Remembering Hiroshima, Imagining Peace, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, Boulder, Colorado

San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace, San Luis Obispo, California

Seven Generations Consulting, Oakland, California

Sisters of Charity of New York, New York, New York

Straits Area Concerned Citizens for Peace, Justice and Environment (SACCPJE),
Cheboygan, Michigan

The Ecology Party of Florida

The Helen Caldicott Foundation, Asheville, North Carolina

The House of the Lord Churches, New York, New York (Rev. Dr. Herbert Daughtry, National
Presiding Minister)

The Peace Farm, Amarillo, Texas

The Rachel Carson Council, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland

Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment), Livermore, California

United for Justice with Peace, Boston, Massachusetts

Uranium Watch, Moab, Utah

US Peace Council, New Haven, Connecticut

Veterans For Peace Chapter 10, Albany, New York

WeAreWideAwake.org, Florida

World Peace Now, Point Arena, California