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.

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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**
Fundació per la Pau – Foundation for Peace, Barcelona

**SWEDEN**
Swedish Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms
Swedish Peace Council

**UNITED KINGDOM**
Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Article 36
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