

*Remarks on the Dangers of Nuclear Weapons
and The Marshall Islands Tragic Experience*

GLOBAL ZERO INSTITUTE

Chicago, Illinois
October 13, 2012

*Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D.
President,
The Simons Foundation*

Thank you very much. It was a pleasure to meet you last night and to be here at this Global Zero Institute, and, as well, to be invited to address you on the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Your presence here gives me hope that we can return the issue of nuclear disarmament to the prominence it deserves. It is extremely satisfying to know that you are ready and willing to engage your minds and energies – and to breathe new life into - what I believe is - the most critical issue of our time.

Like you, I was a University student when I began to work for a nuclear weapon-free world. In the early 1980s - during the Reagan build-up of nuclear weapons - I marched with students and professors from my university. Even without the tools of Twitter and Facebook, over one hundred thousand participated in our first march in Vancouver. These marches, which took place in many parts of the world – one million in New York, one million at The Hague, three million in Europe to name some – were effective forms of protest and played a large part in the desire of Gorbachev and Reagan to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Our task is to find a way to bring people to the streets again to protest, first of all, the dangers of living in a world with of nuclear weapons; and secondly of their inhumane nature, as indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction.

I was in graduate school when my daughter began having nightmares about nuclear war so I decided it was necessary to *do more* than just march as a form of protest. And, in 1985, I established The Simons Foundation with a mandate to work against the negative effects of technology - specifically to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

It is past time to *wake up* America to the reality of nuclear dangers – to the reality of what a nuclear weapon is; to the reality that we are threatened every day of our lives by the possibility of a devastating nuclear accident; of an accidental or malicious launch of nuclear weapons; or of their acquisition by terrorists; and the potential for a catastrophe of a magnitude *far* greater than the 9/11 terrorist attack.

It is essential that people understand *why* nuclear weapons should be eliminated – not just because they are redundant Cold War weapons but because *their very existence* poses great danger to humans. This is our task – to educate the public on the nature of these armaments. And it is quite a challenge!

The technology for fighting war has become so sophisticated that one person, safe from harm himself, has the ability to kill hundreds. Or in the case of the nuclear warrior in the secret underground missile silos with their weapons – millions - with absolutely *no connection to the result* of his actions.

The abstract nature of this kind of war breeds alienation so that these individuals can - with no moral reservations or reflection - kill with impunity. It is, therefore, easy to

understand then why the general public appears to pay little regard to these issues – why the potential for mass killing and the possibility of committing genocide – or of becoming a victim - does not resonate in the public realm.

It very important the educate people about what a nuclear weapon actually is and does. Nuclear weapons ought not to be viewed as in the same class as conventional weapons. The late Hans Morgenthau, - Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and at City University New York - warned that it is a fallacy to think conventionally about nuclear weapons.

Weapons of war prior to Hiroshima, he said, were tools of engagement between two warring parties after which one would be defeated and the other emerge the winner - "a rational relationship between a means, an instrument and an end." In his view, to refer to nuclear instruments and their utilization as weapons of war is resorting to euphemisms. A nuclear device, he said, is not a weapon but "an instrument of unlimited, universal destruction"; nuclear war is not war, but - to quote him, "suicide and genocide.... a self-defeating absurdity".¹

The world has been sleepwalking through the many warning signs which "were consistently ignored"; and we are now in the situation, where technologies of mass destruction are rapidly becoming more accessible. And we are in the position in which one group - either state or terrorist - can destroy the life of all on this planet.²

It is difficult for the human mind to grasp this. Jonathan Schell, in *The Fate of the Earth*, writes that it is anathema to conceive of one's own death.

Robert Jay Lifton, psychiatrist and specialist in issues of weapons of mass destruction, explains the phenomenon as "*psychic numbing*."

All of us here in this room - I imagine - have been born into this post-World War II highly technologicalized and militarized society and culture. Yet people have *not* always lived in such a state. The world changed dramatically after the development and use of the atomic bomb in 1945. The pre-World War II *industrial society* was transformed into a *military* industrial society, in which the military establishment and arms industry became the primary economic driving force – thus underpinning society and culture.

We have entered a new age of Cyber Warfare with the danger *of cyber attacks* and the danger of *cyber failure*. We are seeing a growing community of Internet hackers - both individuals and representatives of states – on a regular basis - attempting to penetrate the

¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Fallacy of Thinking Conventionally About Nuclear Weapons", *Arms Control and Technological Innovation*, ed. David Carlton & Carlo Schaerf, 1977, 2pp. 255

² Stanley I. Greenspan & Stuart Shanker, *The First Idea*, 2004, 426-7.

Pentagon and the nuclear weapons command and control systems - *an extremely dangerous and frightening situation* - because the command and control system is highly automated.

We are fortunate – and it is perhaps miraculous - that we have survived until now without a nuclear catastrophe.

We are engaged in an ever-ascending upward spiral of research, development, manufacture and deployment of high tech weapons, which are exceedingly dangerous to humanity. And we are so psychologically conditioned to accept the *status quo* that it is very difficult to *even* imagine a safer world – a world not bristling with this dangerous weaponry.

The current United States military budget – which stands at more than half the combined military budgets of the rest of the world – is higher than during the Cold War. The United States nuclear weapons budget is twenty percent higher than in the 1980s – the Reagan era of massive build-up of nuclear arsenals.

Nuclear weapons have become an *accepted weapon* – and in fact considered by many – *an essential weapon* – in these huge military arsenals.

The nuclear weapon states have legally committed to elimination of their weapons. Yet in the last few years, the nuclear weapons states - *including the United States* – have been *upgrading* their arsenals.

Americans have never known their country’s true nuclear history – the true history of the United States use of nuclear weapons; of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of the 67 nuclear bomb tests on the Marshall Islands.

I will tell you about the fate of the Marshall Islanders:

In March of this year, the United Nations Human Rights Council sent a Special Rapporteur to the Marshall Islands on a fact-finding mission on *human rights issues*, associated with the 67 nuclear tests, between 1946 and 1958, conducted there by the United States.

He found the people living like nomads and suffering long-term health effects. And urged “the country’s government, the United States and the international community to find effective redress to the affected population.”³

Since 1954, the people of the Marshall Islands have engaged in “a lifelong battle for their health and a safe environment.” The radioactive fallout destroyed the lives of many – with deaths from leukaemia, brain tumours, thyroid and other forms of fatal cancers. Their food sources were destroyed – staple crops, like arrowroot, disappeared

³ www.2.ohchr.org/english/issues/environment/waste/index.htm

completely; the fish were radio-active and instantly caused blisters, terrible stomach problems and nausea.

The radioactive fallout from the nuclear testing has affected the health of three generations so far – and has definitely jeopardized the lives of future generations. The consequences have been the inability to reproduce, and the birth of severely deformed babies – entities - because in many cases they do not resemble human forms. There were no words in the Islanders language to describe these “monster” babies – some with two heads – so they described them as “octopuses,” “apples,” “turtles” and “jellyfish babies” who lived for a day or two - with no bones and transparent – their brains and beating hearts visible.

Their experience provides an understanding of what life would be like for any survivors of any catastrophic incident involving nuclear weapons. And we must prevent a fate, like that of the Marshall Islanders, from ever happening again.

We are at risk because of the continued existence of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert and targeted for immediate launch. We are at risk from nuclear accidents, from an accidental or mistaken launch; and from inadequate command/control and warning systems. We are at risk from the acquisition of nuclear weapons, and their use by non-state terrorists because of the inadequate security for fissile materials and warheads. And we are at risk from proliferation of nuclear weapons.

However, there is some good news!

The number of nuclear weapons has more than halved since the 1980s. Though this is hardly good news! Because the some 19,000 nuclear weapons that remain, combined, have the destructive capability of approximately one hundred and fifty-thousand (150,000) Hiroshima bombs.

But the numbers do continue to come down. President Obama appears to be following through on the commitment he made, in his Prague speech, to the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons. He is currently considering a moderate reduction of the U.S. arsenal. And if he is re-elected we can assume he will act on this.

This does not mean that we can sit back and believe we are on the way to zero. For one thing, cutting to say, 1000 U.S. weapons, with a number in reserve, combined with the arsenals of Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, Pakistan and India, are still enough to incinerate us all.

I am ever the optimist and hope that if re-elected for a second term, President Obama takes his constitutional right – his Presidential Nuclear Initiative - and like George H.W. Bush in the 1990s - makes deep cuts the nuclear arsenal. As President, he does have the right under the Constitution to make these cuts. He does not require Congressional approval.

We have our work to do to ensure that the world continues on the path to zero. And it is wonderful to have so many of you young, interested, and concerned people here to apply your intelligence and energy in order to bring this about.

Your presence breathes new life into this very important issue, and provides encouragement to those of us who have been actively attempting to rid the world of these weapons for so many years. Your presence here demonstrates your concerns, your interest and your energies and gives me the confidence that perhaps I can retire soon. And I wish you *every* success.

In an age where a world war, involving weapons of mass destruction, could eliminate the entire human species, it is essential that we do not continue on this self-destructive path.

Thank you!

Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D.
President
The Simons Foundation

October 13, 2012