

For Release

Canadian Action for Nuclear Disarmament

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Metta Spencer, that valiant champion of how to save the world in a hurry, has urged us to speak briefly when addressing the immense question of planetary survival. In focusing on nuclear weapons, which are the paramount threat to global security, I can think of no more succinct warning than the operating principle agreed to by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev while the Cold war still raged:

A nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought.

Those twelve words need to be driven into the minds of every political leader in the world. If they cannot yet agree on what, exactly, constitutes nuclear disarmament, they surely can agree on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences resulting from any use of nuclear weapons and the consequent need to completely eliminate such weapons.

The basic figures are stark. Nine states—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea—possess nearly 15,00 nuclear weapons (92 percent held by the U.S. and Russia). About 1,800 of these are kept in a state of high operational alert, meaning they could be

fired on 15 minutes' notice. Even a limited nuclear war, which would kill millions, would put up to two billion people at risk of starvation.

“We are one mechanical, electronic or human error away from a catastrophe that could eradicate entire cities from the map,” U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned last week.

The message the world needs to hear about planetary survival is a pungent one: the only guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is their verifiable elimination.

That goal seems unachievable in today's chaotic political climate. In fact, the reverse seems to be happening. A new nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Russia is underway, and all the nuclear weapons states are modernizing their nuclear arsenals. The new U.S. Nuclear Posture Review will institutionalize the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence as a permanent feature of great power relations and, for the first time, the U.S., which plans to spend \$1.2 trillion over the next thirty years on nuclear modernization, now threatens to use a nuclear response to combat non-nuclear aggression.

Out of the mounting frustration of the nuclear powers violating their legal obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue “good faith” negotiations to nuclear disarmament, a humanitarian movement against the possession of nuclear weapons arose and produced the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This Treaty, which will enter into force when ratified by fifty states, gives us hope because for the first time the possession of nuclear weapons is stigmatized as illegal as well as immoral. The major states resist the new Treaty precisely because it is a historic step in raising world opinion and action against the possession of nuclear weapons.

One would expect that Canada would support the new Treaty because it represents a significant step in the long road towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Instead, Canada, shockingly, is opposing the Treaty on the spurious grounds that it is premature and will interfere with the work of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. These are bogus arguments. The real reason for Canada's resistance is the U.S. demand that all the NATO states refuse to join in. Acting under U.S. dominance, NATO continues to insist that nuclear weapons are the "supreme guarantee" of security.

The critical issues of North Korea and Iran are in the headlines and the world lives on the brink of a catastrophe in either or both regions. New diplomatic action is needed to resolve the poisonous relationship between the West and both Iran and North Korea. Regardless of what happens in both areas, the fundamental problem of nuclear weapons remains: the powerful states arrogate unto themselves the right to possess, and threaten to use, nuclear weapons while proscribing their acquisition by any other state. This discriminatory policy is not viable and will not survive. The proliferation of nuclear weapons will continue unless a global treaty eliminates them.

In his new agenda for disarmament, *Securing Our Common Future*, U.N. Secretary-General Guterres has appealed for urgent action: "...the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations. But our efforts towards this end remain in a state of severe crisis. Reversing the further deterioration of the international security environment requires a return to the mindset where the pursuit of nuclear disarmament is understood as the best means for preserving peace, preventing major inter-State war and maintaining stability in times of turbulence."

The U.S. and Russia have the primary responsibility for avoiding catastrophe, but other states must help them to take steps to reduce nuclear stockpiles.

Canada has an immense responsibility to be a bridge-builder to strengthen the global security condition.

The job of civil society leaders, such as those present at this conference, is to demand meaningful government action in reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons in a verifiable, time-bound manner. Here in Canada, as a federal election approaches, we must step up our work to demand that all the political parties commit themselves to signing the Prohibition Treaty and work to change NATO's outmoded nuclear weapons policies. Canada must renounce reliance on nuclear deterrence. Can we inject courage into the Canadian political system to do so?