A tremendous party for the whole world

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Dedication

“Ten years from now, [President Reagan] would be a very old man. He and Gorbachev would come to Iceland and each of them would bring the last nuclear missile from each country with them. And they would give a tremendous party for the whole world ... He would be very old by then, and Gorbachev would not recognise him. The President would say, ‘Hello Mikhail.’ And Gorbachev would say, ‘Ron, is it you?’ And then they would destroy the last missiles.”

Account by the rapporteur, in the official memorandum of conversation, of comments made by President Ronald Reagan to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev at their summit meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, on October 12, 1986, when, for a moment, they appeared to have agreed to the elimination of all their nuclear weapons within ten years. Cited in Schell J. The seventh decade. New York; Metropolitan Books, 2007.

I thank Gensuikyo for inviting me and am pleased and honoured to be among you.

Today we confront challenges of a kind and scale unprecedented in the 4.6 billion year history of our planet. Rampant climate change and obscene nuclear arsenals jeopardise global health and survival in a way which could is fundamentally eroding the earth’s capacity to support life. We cannot choose our time, but must rise to these challenges because failure is not an option. Whatever else we do, whatever field we work in, addressing these paramount threats is everyone’s business.

In October 2007 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said: “The most dangerous consequences of nuclear weapons are here and now. A nuclear disaster will not hit at the speed of a glacier melting. It will hit with a blast. It will not hit with the speed of the atmosphere warming but of a city burning.”
I believe we now have the best opportunity we have had since the end of the Cold War, perhaps ever, to head decisively towards abolishing nuclear weapons. We do not know how long it will last. Unlike the last opportunity, it must not be squandered.

**The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons**

ICAN was established by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in 2006. ICAN aims to mobilise an irresistible groundswell of public pressure that will encourage and compel leaders to finally abolish nuclear weapons. It grew out of alarm at the utter failure of the 2005 NPT Review Conference to agree anything, and several months after that profound wake-up call, the failure of the World Summit – the largest ever gathering of heads of state – to agree a single line on nuclear weapons. We have been inspired by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a broad coalition of civil society organizations and initially just a few governments which resulted in a treaty in little more than 5 years.

‘Nuclear apartheid’ will never work – even one nuclear weapon in any government’s hands will be a driver for inevitable proliferation. The only sustainable approach is one consistent standard for all – zero nuclear weapons. ICAN is convinced that abolishing nuclear weapons is necessary, urgent and feasible. The most effective and practical way to achieve and sustain the abolition of nuclear weapons is to negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) – a comprehensive, irreversible, binding, verifiable treaty that would deal with all the necessary aspects of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as an integrated package. It should include those inside and those outside the NPT. Such an approach has been the basis for all the successes to date in eliminating whole classes of weapons, such as chemical and biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions.

Negotiations could commence within no more than 1-2 years, and abolishing nuclear weapons should take no more than 15-20 years. Reagan and Gorbachev spoke in terms of a decade. Once commenced, negotiations should progress in good faith and without interruption until a successful conclusion is reached.

Incremental steps can be important to move things along, create momentum, demonstrate good faith, and implement needed pieces of the jigsaw. The explicit goal and standard for all such measures should be advancing abolition. But it is difficult to get anywhere without a roadmap; it is difficult to put together a jigsaw puzzle without a picture of what the end result should look like. An NWC can provide both the vision and the roadmap to get there.

In 2007 ICAN coordinated and published an updated model NWC developed through a collaboration of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, and the International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation. It was presented by the governments of Costa Rica and Malaysia to the 2007 NPT PrepCom, and to the 2007 UN General Assembly, so is available in the 6 UN languages as UN Document A/62/650. It has also been published in Japanese. On 24 Oct 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said:

“First, I urge all NPT parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon-states, to fulfil their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament.
They could pursue this goal by agreement on a framework of separate, mutually-reinforcing instruments. Or they could consider negotiating a nuclear-weapons convention, backed by a strong system of verification, as has long been proposed at the United Nations. Upon the request of Costa Rica and Malaysia, I have circulated to all UN member states a draft of such a convention, which offers a good point of departure.”

Despite this commendation at the highest level, very few governments have yet undertaken a serious examination of the model convention or actively taken it forward. Yet in recent years a total of 135 states, and 127 last December, voted in the UN General Assembly for a resolution supporting commencement of negotiations for a NWC, 29 opposed it, and 28 abstained. Those supporting include nuclear-armed China, India and Pakistan.

**Nuclear developments in Australia**

For almost 12 years to November 2007, the Howard government drove an aggressive nuclear agenda in almost every aspect short of acquiring nuclear weapons. Though thwarted by consistent community and indigenous opposition, it sought aggressively to expand uranium mining and exports. The good work of the distinguished Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, established by the previous government, was buried. Disarmament commitment and capacity were downgraded and demoralised. In almost every aspect, Australia lost its independence to subservience to the Bush administration. Promises were broken and all potential indigenous, human rights and environmental protections that might be obstacles to federal imposition of a radioactive waste dump in central Australia were cast aside. 25 nuclear power reactors, the most aggressive per capita nuclear build in the world were foreshadowed. The US Global Nuclear Energy Partnership was embraced. Highly proliferation-sensitive laser enrichment of uranium was supported in the publicly-funded nuclear facility. It is clear that this aggressive agenda was a factor in the government’s decisive election defeat. At the first shadow Cabinet meeting within a week of the election, Howard’s party dropped its support for nuclear power in Australia.

The Rudd government came to office with a strong commitment to play a more independent, active, middle power, multilaterally-engaged role; with nuclear disarmament a priority and a clear commitment to support, indeed “drive the international agenda for” a nuclear weapons convention. However, while there have been welcome developments such as inclusion of civil society representatives in the official NPT delegation, and some changes to Australia’s UN voting, there has been disappointing little substantive policy review and revision, initiative or leadership on disarmament, or a shake-up and strengthening of long-neglected disarmament expertise and capacity in government.

**The International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament**

An important exception is the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament announced by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Kyoto last June, co-chaired by former Japanese and Australian foreign ministers Yoriko Kawaguchi and Gareth Evans. It is appropriately pitched more politically than technically, with the immediate goal of helping to make the May 2010 NPT Review Conference a success, with subsequent follow-up. It brings together some influential figures as
Commissioners and advisors. It is well-connected especially in the US and has been well-received by the new US administration.

Akira Kawasaki of Peaceboat and I have been appointed as NGO advisors to the Co-chairs. We have strongly commended the NWC, and urged that the Commission as much as possible set the stage for and facilitate negotiations on a NWC to commence. We have also identified controlling the serious proliferation dangers intrinsic to the nuclear industry currently as a priority, and the need for all states to contribute to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons, including by reducing the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies. It is this aspect I want now to address.

Critical challenges for Japan and Australia

Japan and Australia have a great deal in common. Both are arguably currently more a part of the nuclear problem than the solutions, particularly in the areas of uranium mining, nuclear power and production of fissile materials; and in the role they play in a nuclear alliance.

Australia holds 40% of the world’s known uranium reserves, and is currently the second largest uranium exporter. Uranium is of course both the feedstock for nuclear power generation but also the raw material for nuclear weapons, and the material and capacity to produce nuclear power intrinsically involves the capacity to produce fissile material usable for nuclear weapons. Uranium is exported under safeguards which provide little more than an illusion of protection now, let alone over the hundreds of thousands of years over which the material is weapons usable. The challenging but achievable goal of a world free of nuclear weapons will be more readily achieved and sustained in a world in which nuclear power generation is being or has been phased out.

Because of the pressing urgency and extreme magnitude of the danger posed by nuclear weapons, ICAN is pleased to collaborate with individuals and organisations committed to the eradication of nuclear weapons, but with divergent views on nuclear power. ICAN advocates measures to reduce the associated proliferation dangers for as long as nuclear power is used around the world, because a world free of nuclear weapons will require the nuclear fuel chain to be managed very differently from currently.

The NPT regime is based on the assumption that it is possible to separate civilian and military uses of nuclear technology. ICAN has reservations about the validity of this assumption. But if this regime is all we have, then it is essential that much tougher barriers be established between civilian and military nuclear uses. In the absence of such measures, the attempt to create a fence between the peaceful and the military “atom” becomes a transparent hoax.

Fissile materials – highly-enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium - are the key ingredients in nuclear weapons, and their control is critical to nuclear disarmament, halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ensuring that non-state organisations do not acquire nuclear weapons.

The most proliferation sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel chain are uranium enrichment, and reprocessing of spent reactor fuel. Any government which can enrich uranium to reactor-grade has everything it needs to enrich uranium further to weapons grade. This is the basis for concerns about Iran’s nuclear program.
Reprocessing of spent reactor fuel to extract plutonium is the second potential source of fissile material. All processes which separate plutonium from spent reactor fuel dramatically escalate proliferation risks. Japan continues to accumulate a vast stockpile of separated plutonium, a nuclear arsenal in-waiting sufficient for more than 10,000 nuclear weapons.

Production of and access to fissile materials should be phased out – the NPT Article IV ‘inalienable right’ of states to pursue essentially all aspects of the nuclear fuel chain short of building weapons is not compatible with a nuclear weapons free world. ICAN therefore advocates:

- All uranium enrichment capacity – whether existing or new - should be multilaterally controlled under UN auspices, with equitable access to low-enriched uranium (LEU)
- HEU should be phased out of civilian uses (including in research reactors, radiopharmaceutical production and ship propulsion) and naval propulsion
- Reprocessing of spent fuel to separate plutonium should be stopped and outlawed
- Stocks of fissile materials should be placed under international control and where possible eliminated (such as by conversion of HEU to LEU)
- IAEA safeguards should be strengthened (including by reduction of significant quantities and time periods on which they are based) and more consistently applied across all nuclear facilities in all states. The resources available to the IAEA should be greatly increased
- The IAEA’s inherent conflict of interest should be removed by removal of promotion of nuclear power from its mandate
- Countries should have access to technical assistance with renewable energy and energy efficiency, such as through the International Renewable Energy Agency initiated by Germany

Japan and Australia also both rely on the ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ provided by the US, and are complicit in US willingness, threats and plans to use nuclear weapons. If US nuclear weapons were used particularly in Asia or the Middle East, it is highly likely that Australian facilities and personnel would be involved, with or without the knowledge or consent of the Australian government and parliament. This is not only fundamentally immoral, but counterproductive and inconsistent.

Both our governments should ‘walk the talk’ on reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our security policies – as we urge nuclear weapon states to do. Our diplomatic efforts towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are compromised by and inconsistent with our continued reliance on a ‘nuclear umbrella’. Making it clear that nuclear weapons undermine rather than enhance our security and rejecting the use of nuclear weapons in our defence and foreign policies would very likely be the most effective measure Japan and Australia could undertake to help de-legitimise these genocidal weapons. Such a principled position would apply the most effective
possible political pressure on our nuclear-armed ally, dramatically raise our profile and credibility on disarmament, and enhance the security of our peoples by reducing the likelihood of being a nuclear target.

In addition, Japanese and Australian facilities and personnel should not play a part in or contribute to any possible use of nuclear weapons, as they currently do.

Both through the work of the Commission and government directly, both countries should undertake a comprehensive analysis of the model Nuclear Weapons Convention; actively engage in international discussions on a NWC; actively explore and promote an NWC approach among other governments and intergovernmental forums; and consider the advantages, disadvantages, requirements and possible paths to such a convention; and promote public, parliamentary, and intergovernmental debate on a NWC.

Concern is growing that disarmament has been stalled, proliferation risks escalating, the NPT is under serious strain, that the needed success at the 2010 NPT Rev Con will require substantial progress on disarmament, and that nuclear business as usual would mean a continuing inexorable slide towards disaster. A burgeoning chorus of powerful ‘realists’ and erstwhile nuclear policy architects – most notably Schultz, Kissinger, Perry and Nunn in the US - support a nuclear weapons free world and getting on with measures to help achieve it. President Obama has come to office with an enormous reservoir of goodwill, with the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons central to his foreign policy, and a detailed set of specific commitments, some timebound, of incremental steps. In the first month of the new administration, we have seen hopeful evidence of real commitment to delivering on reducing nuclear danger. The opportunity we have over the next year or two must be grasped with both hands.

Are our governments really going to continue to regard nuclear weapons as the essential bottom line of our security while President Obama articulates a vision of a world without nuclear weapons?

How can Japan and Australia work to create a world free of nuclear weapons while still being willing accomplices to their possible use?

Will Japan and Australia’s attachment to nuclear weapons mean they become increasing obstacles to their abolition? At what point will they decide to lead and not drag behind trying to straddle impossible contradictions?

Making possible global survival and sustainability through the abolition of nuclear weapons becomes even more urgent as we head deeper into a warming, climate-stressed world with large-scale population displacement, increased likelihood of armed conflict and increased access to the means to produce nuclear weapons.

Those of us who witnessed and live with the legacy of nuclear weapons exploded over our cities and islands and lands have a vital role to ensure that the real stories are told of what happens to flesh and blood humans and their homes and lands in a nuclear explosion, that the next generation knows there can be no legitimate military use and no place in human affairs for the world’s worst weapons of terror, and that they must be eradicated before, inevitably, they are again used.
Japan and Australia could become the champions for a nuclear weapons convention, step out from behind the black nuclear shroud and into the light. It will only happen with but only with our strong and coordinated advocacy.