

Phil Twyford Speech to NCCD AGM 24 March 2008

A Nuclear Weapon Free World: Let's Make the New Zealand Disease a Pandemic

Good afternoon. I want to thank you for inviting me to address your AGM. The NCCD and its constituent members have a proud history of activism on peace and disarmament issues. I salute the work you and many many friends have done over several generations to make a more peaceful New Zealand and a more peaceful world. It is very appropriate this should be the forum for me to have a first attempt at setting out my thoughts on the future of disarmament policy.

I should start with a disclaimer. The ideas I am going to share with you are the early musings of a newly elected Opposition backbencher who is very happy to be the Labour spokesperson on Disarmament.

Happy, because all politicians crave relevance. And frankly what could be more relevant than the survival of the species and of the planet? As far as political issues go it is the ultimate elephant in the room. Yet somehow we accommodate this terrible threat to our survival. It is too awe-inspiring to give it the intellectual and moral attention it deserves. We file it away in the too-hard basket of global issues, and get on with more immediate and soluble problems. What a great political challenge to drag the issue back onto centre-stage. To bring back to the public consciousness an issue that defined the middle years of the 20th century but in the two decades since the end of the Cold War has lost some of its urgency.

The other reason I embrace this challenge is that this is a great Kiwi cause. The story of our changing attitudes to war and peace is the story of our modern New Zealand history. In the span of a hundred years we have gone from being one of the most militaristic nations on earth, to one that has put peace front and centre of its national identity. How did that happen?

That is a whole other story, for another time, but I do want to acknowledge the lineage back to the pacifist traditions of the Moriori; the non violence of Te Whiti and Tohu; conscientious objectors like Archibald Baxter and Mark Briggs who elevated dissent against war to an art form and were tortured by the state for their trouble; and anti-conscription campaigners like my Labour Party forebears who were jailed in WW1 but went on to implement conscription during World War Two in what they believed was a just war against fascism.

I believe also that we must honour the many thousands of men and women who served their country and gave their lives in wars that decimated whole generations and left in many of the survivors and the bereaved a revulsion for war and a determination that the point of politics and government and foreign policy was to end war or avoid it, whether or not it could be said to be just.

Growing up in the shadow of the bomb our baby boomers had to get used to the apocalypse. They cast a more sceptical eye on the wars of our allies. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the campaigns against French nuclear testing in the Pacific, and the anti-Vietnam War were nation building experiences, and they were led by people I regard as heroes. Norman Kirk spoke for the hopes of a generation when he railed against French testing and sent the frigate to Moruroa. Since then my generation had the exhilaration of the peace movement at its peak – I marched up and down Queen St and sailed the Waitemata to

blockade American nuclear armed ships. How proud David Lange made us when he punctured the absurd logic of mutually assured destruction. We saw the adoption of the nuclear free law, the searing experience of the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior, the campaign for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, and the plucky against-the-odds success of the World Court Project.

The pride of our armed forces is now the work they do, sometimes unarmed, bringing peace to communities as far flung as Bougainville, the Solomons, Afghanistan and Timor Leste. Peace making has become the Kiwi way. And should, I believe, become the focus of our 21st century foreign policy. The cross-party support for our nuclear free policy sets the platform for this.

Against this backdrop, I want to make the case for a new chapter in our peace-making history. The moment is right, I believe, for a renewed commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Timing is everything and I think the time is right for a new approach.

The tectonic plates are shifting. The election of President Obama with his *Yes we can* mantra has raised hopes around the globe that we may be entering an era of progress on reducing the threat of nuclear war.

"It's time to send a clear message to the world: America seeks a world with no nuclear weapons," Mr Obama said during the presidential campaign.

Within days of being sworn in, the new Administration said "it will take several steps down the long road toward eliminating nuclear weapons. Obama and Biden will stop the development of new nuclear weapons; work with Russia to take US and Russian ballistic missiles off hair trigger alert; seek dramatic reductions in US and Russian stockpiles of nuclear weapons and material; and set a goal to expand the US-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global."

Restarting the START negotiations with Russia is hugely significant. Obama aims to get both their nuclear arsenals down to 1000 warheads each; a reduction of 80%. Still enough to do a lot of damage but a quantum leap from the 15,000 they used to have.

The negotiations will be led by Hillary Clinton who told her Senate confirmation hearing this: "While defending against the threat of terrorism, we will also seize the parallel opportunity to get America back in the business of engaging other nations to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons.....The Non Proliferation Treaty is the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime, and the United States must exercise the leadership needed to shore up the regime. So, we will work with this committee and the Senate toward ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and reviving negotiations on a verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty."

I can't stress enough how potentially game changing it is to hear this kind of talk coming out of the White House. Moreover, there are stirrings of a more comprehensive approach to nuclear disarmament that could see the emergence of a Nuclear Weapons Convention which could prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

For many years now an incrementalist approach has been favoured by pro-disarmament Governments. Multiple approaches and small steps have been seen as the way to chip away at a problem that always seems too huge, too difficult, rooted as it is in the reliance of the superpowers on nuclear deterrence theory.

But increasingly voices are now questioning whether these small steps can ever make headway. As Margaret Beckett (UK Foreign Secretary, 2007) famously noted, if William Wilberforce had only aimed to 'regulate' or 'reduce' the slave trade, he would have failed. So too with nuclear weapons. They need to be prohibited and eliminated under strict and effective international control.

This truth is now dawning on even hard-nosed political 'realists' who formerly supported nuclear deterrence. It is understood by the new US administration. And a comprehensive approach, including the possibility of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) is being promoted in a historic move by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Currently there are initiatives focused on curtailing nuclear proliferation, reducing the number of nuclear weapons and doctrines that could render less likely their use. These include a treaty banning nuclear testing, a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile materials, additional controls put on nuclear energy facilities, taking nuclear weapons off high operational readiness and further cuts in nuclear stockpiles. However, these initiatives don't eliminate the risk nuclear weapons pose, and if pursued independently are unlikely to succeed because of two key factors – a) they are discriminatory, and/or b) they fail to address the core issue of the unacceptability of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, and the continuing reliance on nuclear deterrence.

Due to the asymmetry in nuclear capabilities between countries, partial non-proliferation or disarmament measures are bound to be discriminatory. The **Non-Proliferation Treaty**, for example, divides the world into two categories of countries – the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) which exploded a nuclear weapon prior to 1967 and the non-Nuclear Weapon States (Non-NWS). The non-NWS are prohibited from developing nuclear weapons and are required to place their nuclear energy facilities under safeguards – while the NWS are exempt from these requirements. This is unsustainable. Three countries -India, Pakistan and Israel – remain outside the NPT, one has withdrawn from the NPT (North Korea) and others could follow.

The **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** is also discriminatory in that it prohibits nuclear explosions but does not prohibit technologically advanced forms of testing that a few States (France, Russia, the UK and the USA) have developed. India, the country which originally proposed the CTBT, tried to make it comprehensive, but when their attempts failed, they walked away from the treaty. Their refusal to sign prevents it from entering into force.

The discriminatory nature of these, is exacerbated by the claims of the nuclear weapons States which maintain that nuclear weapons in their hands are legitimate and required for security, but that nuclear weapons in other hands are illegitimate. These policies stimulate, rather than prevent proliferation.

While countries hold on to the threat or use of nuclear-weapons, they will not be prepared to take steps that undermine their military capacity to implement such options. Thus, they will only accept minimal and relatively insignificant disarmament steps.

Real progress on nuclear disarmament will thus require prohibiting the threat or use of nuclear weapons in security policies and abandoning nuclear deterrence.

A number of authorities - including former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former US President Jimmy Carter, the Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction, the four former US high-level officials (Henry Kissinger, William Perry, George Shultz and Sam Nunn) and Gareth Evans (Co-chair of the recently established International Commission on Non-proliferation and Disarmament) - agree that the old approach, of focusing on non-proliferation and a number of limited disarmament steps, is failing, and that a comprehensive approach, which includes the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, is imperative.

The political opening for such an approach that is centred on abolition has widened with the election of a US President Obama.

These political possibilities have enabled the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to take an incredibly bold move on UN Day 24 October 2008 and announce a five point plan for nuclear disarmament, the first point of which focused on a comprehensive approach through negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention (NWC).

The UN Secretary-General's five-point plan for disarmament

The UN Secretary-General's five-point plan combines a visionary abolitionist goal with practical reinforcing steps and actions to reach that goal. The UN Secretary-General (UNSG) highlighted the idea of a NWC, and referred to the draft of such a convention which he had circulated to all UN member countries. He urged States to use this draft as a useful starting point in considering the possibilities and modalities to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons. He then discussed a number steps and actions that should be taken concurrently in a number of forums including the Conference on Disarmament, the UN Security Council, the NPT conferences, bilateral negotiations and regional negotiations (including through the establishment of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones).

The UNSG's plan has opened the door for governments to consider a nuclear weapons convention, at the same time as undertaking other practical steps that would lead to the conclusion of such a convention.

Despite the new opportunities for progress we must not kid ourselves this will be easy. The nuclear weapons lobbies are extremely powerful. These include the conservative political parties around the world, the nuclear weapons laboratories, the corporations involved in manufacturing nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, the policy makers from NWS hanging on to the privileged power that the nuclear club has provided, and most of all the reliance of our global security system on nuclear deterrence.

It is true also that we now have an opportunity, the best since Reagan sat down with Gorbachev, to make progress on nuclear disarmament. We must rise to the challenge. These opportunities don't come round very often. It will require coordinated global action by grassroots activists, policy makers, diplomats, civil society, politicians and academia.

And there is a role for New Zealand if we want to take it. We have the credentials, the history and the people to contribute strongly to this global campaign. We can draw on the superb rhetoric of David Lange in making the ethical case for nuclear abolition. We can draw on the modern tradition-in-the-making of New Zealand as a peace maker. And build on the smart, patient, tactical diplomacy and advocacy that underpinned the case we won against France at

the International Court of Justice, our contribution to the New Agenda Coalition, and our leadership on the Cluster Munitions Treaty.

But it will take a step change. The comprehensive approach requires a willingness to campaign, to advocate, and mobilise political will – more so than traditional diplomacy. We need to look for allies, and build a caucus of nations ready to back the Secretary General's Five Point Plan as the basis for a new way forward.

We can also work with other nations to build the global movement of nuclear weapons free zones. These zones, as we know from the experience of our own peace movement, are incredibly effective organising tools. Along with our friends in the Pacific we have direct experience of building a successful nuclear weapon free zone. Lets offer that experience to other nations who want to do the same.

In closing I want to thank and acknowledge the extraordinary work you all do on this issue. I particularly want to recognise Alyn Ware and Kate Dewes, and others who have helped me get up to speed in this new role. I look forward to working with you all.

The international community has achieved global treaties to prohibit the use - and eliminate the stockpiles - of chemical weapons, biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions. Yet nuclear weapons – the most destructive of weapons systems – remain in arsenals and military doctrines nearly 70 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We believe that nuclear weapons are unworthy of civilization and are more of a problem than any problem they seek to solve. Their destructive effect is inherently contrary to international humanitarian law and any basic sense of decency. They are no use against terrorists, patently immoral to be used against states without them, and suicidal if used against a state with them. The universal acceptance of the legal norm against their use is vital in order to eliminate their threat and achieve a nuclear weapons free world.

Now is the time for a fresh approach.

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