

# Letter to First Committee Delegates on Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems

Written by John Hallam

Wednesday, 26 September 2012 20:51 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 21:53

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## OPERATIONAL READINESS OF NUCLEAR WEAPON SYSTEMS

TO  
FIRST COMMITTEE DELEGATES REGARDING THE UNGA RESOLUTION ON  
OPERATIONAL READINESS

Dear Delegate to First Committee,

This letter is written to you for consideration of your vote on the UNGA resolution on Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems in 2010.

The authors of this letter are from the NGOs whose efforts resulted in the adoption of that resolution from 2007 onwards, thanks to the energetic sponsorship of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Switzerland (the 'De-alerting Group').

As you will know, this resolution with some minor changes, is to be submitted to First Committee once more this year.

We encourage you to attend the side-panels that the De-Alerting group is organising on this subject.

The possibility of unauthorized, unintended or miscalculated use of nuclear weapons, resulting in an accidental, inadvertent, and catastrophic nuclear conflict, is what this resolution deals with. Such an event may be considered by some to be a remote chance – but the stakes of such a mis-step are so high that inaction is not an option. There remains a global threat that, at least potentially, affects everybody no matter what their location and no matter what their security arrangements. Just as with Climate Change there is literally no place on earth that can escape the catastrophic, long-term environmental effects of a war fought with nuclear weapons.

Even the use of a small fraction of global nuclear arsenals will have catastrophic humanitarian consequences of global extent, to which no government can be indifferent.

The 2006-2007 research by Toon, Robock and others shows that the effects of the injection of large quantities of soot into the stratosphere would be global in its impact, whether that came from a US-Russia nuclear exchange or an Indo-Pak one. A study to be presented at this year's First Committee makes clear that the use of even a small

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fraction of global nuclear arsenals will create catastrophic global humanitarian consequences, with up to a billion deaths from famine in addition to around 150 million immediate casualties.

The International Commission on Nonproliferation and Nuclear Disarmament (ICNND), in its 2010 report, stated that the possibility of nuclear war by accident was not a fantasy, but 'a frightening possibility'. Launch-ready weapons create the possibility of unauthorized use (rogue commanders, terrorists who take physical possession of the weapons, etc), unintended use (i.e., an accidental nuclear war based upon a false warning of attack) and miscalculated use in a conflict situation where launch-on-warning leaves no time for adequate decision-making before actual use. The latter, should it involve the US and Russia, would likely trigger the launch of a large fraction of the more than 1700 strategic nuclear warheads now on high alert. This is actually MORE likely than the launch of just one or two 'rogue' ICBMs.

Lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, as the Operational Readiness resolution calls for (and also a number of other resolutions, notably Reducing Nuclear Dangers and the Non Aligned Movement and United Action resolutions), would be the first vital step to remove the apocalypse from the global agenda.

And, as the ICNND notes, that 'apocalypse' is no fantasy but an all too real possibility that affects potentially the whole world.

Its importance simply trumps all other more short-range considerations, tied as it is to human survival.

We realize that for many governments the possibility of accidental nuclear war may seem far-fetched or remote from your everyday priorities. We understand that many governments have pressing immediate problems, ranging from radical challenges to governance to rising sea-levels.

We submit that, notwithstanding all this, nuclear weapons Operational Readiness demands your priority and attention as an issue that potentially threatens the welfare and even the life of all humans.

Operational Readiness was adopted in 2010 by 157 votes to 3, with 22 abstentions and 18 absences.

A substantially improved vote this time round would significantly improve the prospects for everyone on earth.

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We once more urge you and your governments to give Operational Readiness (and other resolutions on the same topic) your strong support.

Signed

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