

Written by John Hallam
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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT RESOLUTIONS IN FIRST COMMITTEE

'Nuclear Disarmament is a potential Human Survival issue. Voting patterns should reflect that simple brute fact'.

Voting 'yes' to everything (nuclear-weapons-wise) for Human Survival

Dear Delegate to the General Assembly and First Committee:

I wish to draw your attention to a large number of important draft nuclear disarmament resolutions coming up in First Committee and the General Assembly in New York. The newest of these resolutions spring from the series of conferences on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of nuclear weapons that took place in Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna, the last in Dec2014, and the discussions and information revealed in those conferences can be seen in all of them.

They are:

- Draft Resolution on the "Humanitarian Pledge for the Prohibition and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons"
- Draft Resolution on Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons
- Draft Resolution "Taking forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations"
- Draft Resolution 'Ethical Imperatives for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World'
- Draft Resolution 'Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear Weapons-Free World'
- Draft Resolution 'Towards a Nuclear Weapon-Free World – Accelerating the Implementation of Nuclear Disarmament Commitments'.

There are in addition to these 'new' resolutions, a number of other worthy resolutions, every single one of which should be supported by every government, regardless of bloc loyalty or origin. Some of these resolutions are 'hardy perennials' that have come up annually for a number of years or decades.

These include the ICJ followup resolution, the NAM resolution sponsored by Myanmar, and the Indian Reducing Nuclear Dangers Draft Resolution.(A/C 1/70/L.20) Some are also new or relatively new, notably the resolution on followup to the 2013 High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament.(A/C 1/70/L.15), though versions of that resolution were adopted in 2013 and 2014. Widespread and 'out-of-bloc' support (ie support from quarters other than NAM) for all of these resolutions would be most helpful.

The ICJ followup resolution is of particular significance because not only has it received over the years some 'out of bloc' support, but the resolution focuses on the unanimous part of the 1996 ICJ decision to negotiate for complete nuclear disarmament. The ICJ noted in its 1996

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advisory opinion that the effects of nuclear weapons use cannot be contained in space or time.

The new Humanitarian Pledge and Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolutions state repeatedly and unequivocally that the use of nuclear weapons especially in large numbers, would potentially threaten human survival itself, and would definitely threaten the survival of civilization.

Thus, the 3rd para of the Humanitarian Pledge Draft Resolution states that:

“Understanding that the immediate, mid-and long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion are significantly graver than it was understood in the past and will not be constrained by national borders but have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity,”

and again:

'Affirming that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances,'

While according to the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution,

'Recalling also that the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-1) stressed in 1978 that “nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization”,'

and:

'Emphasizing that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world and have deep implications for human survival, for the environment, for socio-economic development, for our economies and for the health of future generations

Stresses that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances;'

Annika Thunborg of the Swedish delegation, a co-sponsor of the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution, noted that:

“We understand that some delegations have problems with the notion that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances. But we ask ourselves, when would it be in the interest of humanity that nuclear weapons are used, under what circumstances? The resolution tries to forge consensus around the notion that it is in the interest of all states that use doesn't occur under any circumstances. Don't we all share this common interest?”

Indeed so! Delegations that have 'problems' should be asked not only 'just when is it in humanity's interest to use nuclear weapons?' But the deeper question 'just what considerations could possibly trump human survival, given that this is potentially at least, what is at stake?'

In somewhat optimistic contrast to Annika's statement (and maybe having asked just those questions) it is notable that even some governments who have been in the past quite averse to language about nuclear weapons as a threat to human survival have now used such language.

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Thus, Australia, in a statement on behalf of some NATO and eastern European countries, notes that:

'...it is in the interests of the very survival of humanity that nuclear war must never occur'.

Ambassador Quinn made a similar notation in Australia's own national statement. We heartily welcome the Australian Government's conversion to this discourse, with all its implications for other Governments and for First Committee as a whole.

A continuing theme of The Human Survival Project (as our name suggests) is that large scale nuclear weapons use would indeed threaten Human Survival. We therefore welcome the increasingly widespread recognition from so many governments and large (sometimes very large) groups of governments, that this is indeed the case.

It may not be absolutely certain that in the event of large-scale nuclear weapons use, all humans would definitely perish over the following few decades from starvation and by literally freezing in the dark. However it is highly probable from the information shared at the Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna Conferences that what we now call 'civilization' would cease to function even if a very few warheads were used. It is highly probable that a subcontinental nuclear war could provoke global famine, and that a larger scale nuclear weapons use such as between Russia and NATO, would, as during the cold war, both completely destroy civilization and would put a question mark at least, behind human survival. Human extinction could not be ruled out: it is 'on the menu'.

That the most immediate threat to humans as a species comes from ourselves via the nuclear arsenals of the largest nuclear weapons possessors is hardly a new idea, (first suggested in 1945, and reiterated in the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto, as well as in various UN declarations) but it is, alas! More true than ever, as reaffirmed by the Evans Commission, and most recently Oslo Nayarit and Vienna.

What is also made clear in the Humanitarian Pledge Draft Resolution is that the danger of large-scale (and other) nuclear weapons use is growing.

This became obvious last January when the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Advisory Board (consisting of a dozen or so Nobel prizewinners) moved the hands of the 'doomsday clock' from 5 minutes to midnight to three minutes to midnight, a position it had not been in since 1983, 'the year the world nearly ended' (an event now highly appropriately commemorated on Sept26, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons').

Thus, the draft resolution on the Humanitarian Pledge notes that:

"Aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability, the ongoing modernization of nuclear weapon arsenals in States possessing nuclear weapons, and the role that is attributed to nuclear weapons in the nuclear doctrines of such states,..."

The currently growing risks of actual nuclear weapons use are reflected in the very necessary

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measures canvassed in the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution. They are also canvassed in the 'Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations' draft resolution. These resolutions include measures to actually reduce those risks, including in particular measures to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapons, and to decrease their salience in security doctrines. Countries with 'extended deterrence' relationships (such as those listed in Ambassador Quinn's statement) should of course play their part in reducing such salience by withdrawing from arrangements of 'extended deterrence', arrangements that not only decrease rather than increase real security, but which also hamstring the ability to advocate consistently for the elimination of nuclear weapons. At the same time, even nuclear alliances could be constructively used/transformed to lobby nuclear weapon states to do the right thing and to cease to be any longer nuclear weapon states.

A resolution that would do much to reduce nuclear dangers is of course, the 'Reducing Nuclear Dangers' Draft Resolution, sponsored by India. In addition, lowering operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems will come up at this First Committee in a number of other resolutions notably 'Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations', in the NAM resolution (not yet tabled as of the writing of this memo), and hopefully in the (not yet tabled) Renewed Determination Draft Resolution. I gather that the Operational readiness resolution sponsored by NZ, Switzerland, Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria and Sweden will not come up in 2015 but only in 2016. This is a pity as it has gathered increasing and well-deserved support from across traditional blocs.(last adopted 166-4).

Both India's Reducing Nuclear Dangers and the Myanmar NAM resolution tended in past years to languish in the so-called 'NAM ghetto' (a 'mere' 2/3-3/4 of all the governments that there are).

This lack of cross-bloc support is completely without justification. In addition it is frequently said of Reducing Nuclear Dangers that some governments refrain from voting for it because it comes from a party (India) that can be seen as helping (together with Pakistan) to put the subcontinent onto a nuclear hair-trigger basis, while preaching nuclear restraint and risk reduction for others. This is an argument that reflects nothing on the actual merits of the risk reduction measures contained in that resolution, and the point could be much more constructively dealt with in an EoV together with a 'YES' vote. Who puts the resolution up should be neither here nor there, and the actual content and merits of the resolution should be central.

'Yes' votes from non-NAM, to resolutions normally considered to be the exclusive province of NAM, in the current atmosphere of urgency over nuclear risks would send a signal that desperately needs to be sent, namely that reducing nuclear risks transcends bloc loyalty. In addition it is this writer's 'naive' belief that resolutions should be evaluated strictly on their obvious 'as stated' textual merits and taken at face value (and that face value insisted upon). As long as a resolution is more-or-less along constructive and helpful lines it is worthy of support, whatever minor points we may have reservations about (after all that is what EoVs are for.) More use of EoVs (and more yes votes) should be made. Above all I make a plea to all and sundry for less reading 'between' the lines and more reading of what the lines actually do say.

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Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has said that in order to actually be effective in advocating for nuclear disarmament it is necessary to 'engage but not enrage' the nuclear weapons powers. This argument is effectively endorsed by a number of governments but cannot in reality be used to argue against the Humanitarian Pledge or a ban. Countering (or using in another way) the 'Bishop argument' is vital to the considerations of ALL governments in First Committee, not just Australia, especially as far as the Humanitarian Pledge is concerned.

It is most certainly necessary to 'engage' the nuclear weapons states. It would be wonderful to see exactly such engagement, engagement aimed at pushing them to genuinely fulfill their art VI NPT obligations, -really taking place by not only US allies/NATO, but by Russian allies. And bluntly – if the nuclear weapons states are going to be persuaded really to let go of their nuclear arsenals a little 'engagement' also, or at least some pretty stiff and real pressure will have to be applied. Finally, nuclear disarmament must be treated as the survival issue it really is. The Australian statement gives lip service to this but fails to point to any way forward to achieving zero sooner rather than later.

We urge NATO governments especially, precisely to engage the nuclear weapons states with the aim of persuading them to eliminate their nuclear arsenals as per their already existing but unfulfilled obligations. The list of governments behind the Australian statement would do well to 'engage' their nuclear-armed allies with a view to getting them to eliminate their nuclear arsenals – and this is precisely not happening. Such engagement would most profitably commence by the signing of the Humanitarian Pledge, and engagement in an OEWG open to all and block-able by none.

Another argument from the 'Bishop' stable is that 'there are no short cuts'. Nobody ever suggested there were. A Ban or NWC or other instrument outlawing nuclear weapons will not lead to instant nirvana and no-one has ever suggested it would do so. But the stigmatizing, marginalizing and explicitly outlawing of what is after all in reality an already illegal weapon system is an absolutely essential step.

When the crunch comes, it has to be emphasized that the survival of humans as a species and of Civilization (as well as most complex land-based living things) has to be regarded as a priority that simply trumps all possible other priorities. There simply CANNOT be a more important priority than this. Human survival (and thus the explicit outlawing of nuclear weapons) must be regarded as in itself a core national security objective for ALL governments, including the 28 governments whose names appear on the Australian statement, who, should the ultimate catastrophe take place and nuclear weapons be used in Europe and globally, will all become toast.

Of course the nuclear weapons states will not immediately sign onto a nuclear weapons ban. Such a ban remains a vital tool in pushing them to cease to be nuclear weapons states as per their art-VI NPT obligations.

Of course the nuclear weapons states will try to make an open-ended working group operate

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by a consensus that they can then block. Of course they will have to be dragged kicking and screaming into elimination of nuclear weapons by ban or convention or other means. Of course their efforts to white-wash an OEWG by using the consensus rule will have to be resisted. (and that is why use of a consensus rule as opposed to UNGA rules of procedure is unacceptable).

But that does not mean that allies of nuclear-armed states will have no influence if they support a ban, convention, or an OEWG as these resolutions suggest. Quite the contrary. Such support would be game-changing. This is exactly why a nuclear weapons ban and/or a nuclear weapons convention is so vitally important.

All governments should wholeheartedly support these draft resolutions. In doing so you are helping reduce the likelihood of complete global catastrophe, an act of deepest ethical significance. And the arguments of Bishop and similar others are simply without foundation.

Finally, I would like to make the rather obvious point that at least amongst nuclear disarmament draft resolutions, there is simply NO draft resolution that any government should not be supporting! A possible title for this memo might have been 'why your government should vote yes to everything'!

There are however a bundle of entirely spurious reasons that are ladled out by various parties for NOT voting in particular for resolutions that emanate from the NAM group. To the author of this memo, after participating for nine years in First Committee and NPT meetings this remains incomprehensible and perverse.

This kind of reflexive thinking (or rather, non-thinking) is entirely unhelpful in confronting a potential catastrophe that, should it (God forbid) ever eventuate, will affect all of us regardless of what diplomatic bloc we happen to be part of.

It's also worth pointing out that while for example, NATO, East-European and other US allies refrain from voting with NAM, NAM does NOT return the compliment, and the most widely supported disarmament resolutions such as Renewed Determination and New Agenda are carried on the NAM vote. I therefore return to a slightly earlier theme that non-NAM support for 'NAM' initiatives such as reducing Nuclear Dangers or the NAM resolution itself would send hugely important and potentially game-changing signals that need very much to be sent. Nuclear disarmament is truly a human survival issue. The voting behaviors of Governments – all of you – need to reflect that simple brute fact.

John Hallam
People for Nuclear Disarmament
Human Survival Project
johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au
jhjohnhallam@gmail.com
61-2-9810-2598
fax 61-2-9699-9182