

Written by John Hallam
Monday, 11 January 2016 20:49 -

**MEMO TO GOVERNMENTS PARTICIPATING IN/SPONSORING OPEN ENDED WORKING
GROUP ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
GENEVA MAY 2016**

People For Nuclear Disarmament
Human Survival Project

Dear Participants in/Sponsors of the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) meetings on Nuclear Disarmament that will take place in Geneva in February, May and August 2016:

First of all we congratulate the sponsors and supporters of the original OEWG resolution for having gotten the OEWG going, and for having had the relevant resolution, L13 Rev1, adopted by a comfortable majority in the General Assembly last December.

In spite of the initial opposition of some governments, a productive dialogue now seems to be possible, or to be taking place, between the leading non-nuclear and anti-nuclear powers, and US allies Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands. This is encouraging.

It would be highly desirable that these latter countries (also getting copies of this memo) participate constructively in the OEWG process. We are hopeful they will do so.

The initiation of a process directed at the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is more urgent than ever.

There is a growing consensus amongst both academic experts/observers and former high military officers, former Secretaries of Defense, etc, that the risk of actual nuclear weapons use - including especially the risk of a catastrophic global nuclear exchange involving a number of thousands of warheads that would terminate what we call 'civilization' – is growing. Risk reduction measures – which we note are specifically mentioned in L13 Rev1 – are vital, tragically overdue, and increasingly urgent. Former US Defense Secretary Perry's calls for nuclear risk reduction, and his warning that current risks of 'catastrophe' exceed risk levels during the Cold War, must be taken on board.

The Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and their allies argue that the 'security' dimension of nuclear weapons needs to be taken into account. We don't dispute this. It is precisely the security threat posed by nuclear weapons that impels a need and determination to get rid of them forever.

However, we also recognize that some states continue to rely on nuclear weapons for security, despite the threat this poses to humanity. This reliance on nuclear weapons has to be replaced by other methods to achieve security – in particular cooperative security. The OEWG could play a role in exploring how security can be met without reliance on nuclear weapons.

The security dimensions of nuclear weapons should therefore be discussed at the OEWG and

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in dialogue with the NWS should they refuse to participate directly in the OEWG – and in these terms. The evidence on risks and catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons provided at Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna, provides the imperative and starting point for such dialogue. The prohibition and elimination of nuclear arsenals at an early date should be seen as itself a security imperative and a common good of the very highest importance.

It would also be important in OEWG discussions to adopt a multi-pronged approach to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

At the same time as recognizing that there is no single, uniquely correct, approach to nuclear weapons abolition (and that behaving as if there was, is itself a major obstacle to abolition taking place), it is also the case that the measures canvassed in the statement (WP9) of the New Agenda Coalition (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa) last May are all very useful. It is important however that we do not get bogged down in largely semantic discussions about, for example, the differences between a 'Ban' and a 'Convention' (which WP9 itself points out are points on a continuum), but that we proceed to outline practical measures which one way or another can be implemented, or that nuclear weapon states and their allies can be realistically moved to implement. Such practical, immediate, measures include de-alerting, getting rid of Launch-on-Warning (LoW) postures and affirmations of no-first-use of nuclear weapons.

A Nuclear Weapons Ban may not in and of itself bring about 'nirvana' or the 'kingdom'. Nonetheless a Ban (which with more bells and whistles might morph into a Convention, as implied in WP9) even if it (initially) attracted none of the nuclear weapons states – as seems overwhelmingly likely – can only reinforce motivations within the NWS and other states with nuclear weapons to eliminate their nuclear arsenals and in the meantime to take measures to ensure that nuclear weapons are taken off high alert and, ideally (and practically), never used, and that their place in security doctrines is progressively downgraded.

A Ban or a Convention are not the only games in town. A framework agreement or the 'building blocks' approach may provide better chances of constructive engagement with the nuclear weapons states. It is possible that no one, single, approach will do the trick, and that momentum built up by one approach may facilitate progress with another, different approach.

If a Ban or a Convention is adopted by a comfortable majority of the world's states it is vital that bodies such as US Congressional and Russian Duma subcommittees on strategic forces acknowledge that as far as the overwhelming majority of the world's governments are concerned, nuclear weapons and their possession are illegal. This would be a powerful factor in encouraging progress to abolition by the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) and other nuclear-armed states whether or not they join either a Ban or a Convention.

The same considerations apply with equal force to an interlocking framework of agreements or any other legal device tending to eliminate nuclear weapons.

A Ban – or a Convention or other legal device or devices – must be accompanied by other means of both reducing current intolerable nuclear risks (Perry) and of motivating one way or

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another the governments of the Nuclear Weapons States and other nuclear-armed states (including engagement with them), that will lead them to take their own measures to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

It is encouraging to see that engagement with the NWS and other nuclear armed states is widely seen as important. What is required is a process that involves both engagement and also shows the NWS/other nuclear armed states the wisdom of eliminating their nuclear arsenals.

Finally we must reiterate the importance that we attach to short-term practical measures for reducing nuclear risks, which are growing to levels not seen since the 1980s as a result of the new cold war brewing in Ukraine, eastern NATO countries and the Middle East. A vital part of this would be a lowering of the alert status of nuclear forces. A number of current General Assembly resolutions urge this measure, notably the one on Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems and the India-sponsored Reducing Nuclear Dangers Resolution. It is a pity that non-NAM (Non Aligned Movement) governments do not support the latter resolution—and for reasons that seem entirely insubstantial.

The issues the OEWG will deal with in February and May are of existential importance for humans as a species. The OEWG must not fail. It is thus terribly important that it operate by UNGA rules of procedure, not by a consensus that can be abused.

People for Nuclear Disarmament and the Human Survival Project will present material on reducing nuclear risks to you in May.

Excellencies, please be assured of our highest regard,

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