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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT
AOTEAROA LAWYERS FOR PEACE

STATEMENT/INTERVENTION TO PANEL 1 ON REDUCING NUCLEAR RISKS OEWG MAY 2016

First of all, I want to draw delegates attention to a series of working papers:

--First of all my own, on reducing nuclear risks of which this is a most inadequate summary.

--To the excellent working paper by the De-Alerting Group. I endorse both its conclusions and its recommendations.

--The Basel Peace Office working paper, Building The Framework for a nuclear weapon-free world.

Together with a number of other working papers, not all of which take exactly the same line, we are shown a way – or many ways – out of dependence on potentially world- ending weapons.

Let me re-state the global dilemma outlined in my own paper on nuclear risks:

--Since the early 1960s there has been a nonzero probability of a global apocalypse due to the large-scale use of nuclear weapons in particular land-based ICBMs. These weapons have been on continuous high – alert ever since their first deployments in the 60s, and their use then, as now, would end civilization and much else.

Yet a series of utterly hair-raising events some of which Patricia has just told you about have taken place over the decades, whose study leaves us lucky to be here at all.

That venerable indicator of nuclear danger, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 'Doomsday Clock', has stood at three minutes to 'midnight' for the last 2 years, due primarily to a deteriorating US/NATO-Russia relationship as well as the potential for an India-Pakistan 'mini apocalypse', that might still ultimately cause the deaths of up to 2 billion.

--There has been a chorus of voices from Generals Dvorkin and Cartwright (who I understand is taking the final session here) – both former chiefs of US and Russian nuclear forces – and from former defense secretary Perry, warning of the increasing danger of a large-scale nuclear exchange.

Not a day goes past it seems, without somewhere a news-item often from highly placed and otherwise conservative sources, warning of looming catastrophe.

--In this context, the case both for nuclear abolition and for immediate – term risk reduction is as great as it has ever been.

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And a potentially fatal paradox has arisen: At a time when the need for such measures is so great, when the survival of humans or at least what we call 'civilization' may depend on it, the interest of the two major nuclear weapons powers is less than it has been for many years. Else they would be in this room.

We humans may be lucky and 'get away with' driving a nuclear-loaded truck down a Swiss mountain road without brakes for a decade or two more, and a few more narrow escapes may induce us to believe – rightly or wrongly – that we are divinely protected. But at some point our miracle supply, or our luck, will run out.

The need, both for abolition and nuclear risk reduction, has never been greater.