

Memo to UNGA First Cttee on Nuke Risks, May 2018 High Level Meeting, Resolutions

Written by John Hallam
Wednesday, 25 October 2017 15:33 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

MAY 2018 HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION

URGING SUPPORT FOR: L45, L5, L6, L17, L18, L19, L22, L35, L57

Attn All First Committee Delegates

Dear Delegate to First Committee,

I urge your support for L45, L5, L6, L17, L18, L19, L22, L35, and L57.

This is without prejudice to any other nuclear disarmament resolution scheduled for voting in First Committee in the coming two weeks, that you may already plan to support.

In addition I strongly urge your support for, signature, and ratification of, the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Some Governments counterpose a 'progressive approach' to the TPNW. The two are not in conflict, rather they are mutually reinforcing. All who support the 'progressive approach' should sign the TPNW. All who critique the 'progressive approach' for not progressing should likewise sign the TPNW.

As you know already, Resolution L45 has been tabled in First Committee by the Government of Indonesia, entitled: 'Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament'.

Amongst other matters, the resolution:

'...Decides to convene, in New York from 14 to 16 May 2018, a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament to review the progress made in this regard;' as well as a one-day organizational meeting on 28 March 2018, also in New York.

The resolution also canvasses a number of other matters, noting the adoption and signature of the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and measures to promote September 26th as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

As your missions and foreign ministries are no doubt well aware, Sept26th 1983 was the day (or rather the night) on which the actions of Colonel Stanislav Petrov (who died last May), avoided global thermonuclear war. Had someone else been on duty at Serpukhov-15 that night it is likely we would not be here to talk about the event.

Sept26th is thus all about nuclear risk reduction as well as disarmament: With the risk of nuclear war arguably at an all-time high right now, risk reduction, and all that Sept26th stands for is of existential (ie human survival) significance, as is nuclear disarmament.

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With the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 'Doomsday Clock' at 2 and a half minutes to 'Midnight', 'Midnight' being global thermonuclear war and the end of civilization, and with talk and threats of nuclear war being tossed casually off by leaders who seem unable or unwilling to grasp its significance, both the elimination of nuclear weapons and immediate-term measures to reduce nuclear risks are of human survival significance, and should be prioritized as such. We surmise that this year the Bulletin may wish to move the clock yet closer to midnight, but it is running out of space/time! The point is well made that nuclear risk is now terrifyingly high, and action to reduce it is imperative.

Some Governments have stated their adherence to a 'progressive approach' to nuclear disarmament.

It is my view that the said 'progressive approach' (ie a step-by-step approach) is in no way in conflict with other 'comprehensive' approaches such as that of the Prohibition Treaty (TPNW). Indeed the two are, and can only be, mutually reinforcing. Statements to the contrary completely lack credibility. It is my view that failure to support the TPNW in fact casts doubt on the genuineness of commitment to any path to nuclear disarmament whatsoever, 'progressive' or otherwise.

The 'progressive approach' requires....progress. And a 'step by step approach' requires absolutely that real steps actually be taken, one after the other, and in relatively rapid succession. The resolutions we list would all make for better progress both to risk reduction and to the elimination of nuclear weapons, under whatever 'approach' we use to model disarmament and risk reduction.

Some Governments also state that it is absolutely necessary to take into account the 'realities of the strategic situation'. Most certainly this is the case: it is precisely growing alarm at the increasingly unstable and threatening strategic situation, both with respect to a possible US-DPRK nuclear conflict and with respect to a much much more serious potential US-Russia or US-China nuclear conflict, that makes real and accelerated progress on nuclear disarmament and risk reduction a matter of human survival importance. Nuclear disarmament/elimination and nuclear risk reduction are not feelgood sometime/never/maybe/'some century' options. They are urgent and pressing survival necessities.

The Prohibition Treaty is in part a product of utter frustration (and outright alarm) that the 'progressive approach' is precisely not progressing, and that additional steps must therefore be taken. The First Committee resolutions listed also would help to accelerate the process of nuclear disarmament or else call for measures that would reduce the existential risks posed by nuclear arsenals.

These considerations, we submit, 'trump' all others including short-term 'national security' considerations. The security of the world as a whole and of civilizational and human survival must always have the highest priority.

A truly objective look at the deteriorating situation in strategic stability, will lead inescapably to

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the conclusion, not that we need to 'go slow' on nuclear disarmament in order to 'allow for' current strategic 'realities', but precisely the opposite: That anything other than a radical acceleration in progress toward the elimination of nuclear weapons will lead inexorably to complete catastrophe.

Nuclear risk reduction includes both de-alerting (L22, Reducing Nuclear Danger), no-first-use, and measures to increase, improve, or merely to re-establish, military to military communications between nuclear-armed states. It would include for example, the many times proposed establishment of the Joint Data Exchange Centre in Moscow, repeatedly re-affirmed but never implemented.(JDEC)

The High Level Conference proposed for 14-16May 2018 is an ideal opportunity to raise questions of nuclear risk reduction, as well as other matters relevant to the increasing urgency of making real progress to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

I urge Governments to:

--use this occasion to support nuclear risk-reduction and disarmament measures.

In particular, I call on you to:

Support the UN resolution on the 2018 UN High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament; Announce that you will personally participate in the High-Level Conference, and do what-ever is in your power at the Conference to prevent nuclear weapons being used, and to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world:

3. Announce also that you will sign the new Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons at the UN High-Level Conference.(and lobby other Governments, especially in your own bloc, to do likewise).

There are a number of other resolutions scheduled to be voted on in First Committee and UNGA, which I'd like to see Governments supporting.(list at the start of this letter)

Support for many of these will involve a 'breaking of ranks (or blocs)' which in my view can only be a good thing: Predictable bloc voting is never beneficial or productive of progress. These include L5 on Humanitarian Consequences; L6 Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament negotiations; L17 on Ethical Imperatives; L22, Reducing Nuclear Danger; and L57 Followup to the ICJ Advisory Opinion.

In the context of what I've been saying on reducing nuclear dangers I'd like to especially single out L22 Reducing Nuclear Dangers.

None of the arguments that have been bandied about not to support it seem to actually be real reasons not to support it. The reaction to many of them is (rightly) 'so what?'. Even the current deterioration in strategic stability within the subcontinent itself would mean that support for L22 should ideally be accompanied by an EoV pointing to the deteriorating situation in the subcontinent and urging its application there itself. In no sense is that deteriorating situation a reason not to support it – quite the contrary. The arguments that it fails to reference the NPT are frankly neither here nor there. In any case it would be better once again to vote 'yes' to it and make an EoV to the effect that it would have been better, had the NPT been referenced. Clearly, the Indian Government, its chief sponsor, cannot be expected to reference the NPT.

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I urge all Governments to do their utmost at the coming First Committee voting, to advance:

- The scheduled High Level Conference of 14-16 May on nuclear disarmament;
- To make that occasion a matter of the very highest priority for their Governments and to be represented at the highest level possible;
- To use that occasion and the current First Committee to highlight the issue of reducing nuclear risks;
- To vote 'yes' to all the nuclear disarmament resolutions currently on offer, but in particular to (though without prejudice to any resolution not listed) L45, L5, L6, L17, L18, L19, L22, L35, L57.

John Hallam
UN Nuclear Disarmament Campaigner
People for Nuclear Disarmament
Human Survival Project

johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au
jhjohnhallam@gmail.com

61-411-854-612
61-2-9810-2598