

Letter on Operating Status to P5 Meeting Paris 29 June 2011

Written by John Hallam

Thursday, 09 June 2011 21:17 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 22:29

PRESIDENTS, PRIME MINISTERS, FOREIGN MINISTERS, SECRETARIES OF STATE AND DEFENCE, AND DEFENCE MINISTERS OF CHINA, FRANCE, RUSSIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES.

P5 MEETING 29-31 JUNE 2011

OPERATING STATUS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Dear Presidents, Prime Ministers, Defence Ministers, Secretaries of State and Defence, and Foreign Ministers of the 'P5' countries, meeting 29-31 June:

An item that should be on the agenda when you meet in Paris at the end of June is the operating status of strategic nuclear weapons systems, especially in the US and Russia.

The next steps in nuclear disarmament are a logical topic for P5 discussions. The next step in nuclear disarmament is to decrease the role that nuclear weapons play in strategic planning by lowering their operational readiness, thereby significantly lowering the risk of an accidental apocalypse.

This item should be discussed within the context of a commitment to go to zero nuclear weapons and a nuclear weapons convention sooner rather than later. It also must be discussed in the immediate context of US and Russian steps after 'New START', which need to cover more than just tactical nuclear weapons, (on which discussion now centres) but all systems kept in a state of high readiness for use because of their perceived vulnerability to pre-emption.

When elected, President Obama committed to negotiate with Russia to take nuclear weapons off high alert. It is time for this item to be at the top of the negotiating agenda.

Operating status of nuclear weapon systems is a topic that, while leading toward and facilitating progress to the elimination of nuclear weapons and an NWC, has an independent importance all of its own.

At the same time, it concerns all of the P5 governments, (and others), and is a legitimate topic of interest for the entire world, as noted in the final declaration of the last (2010) NPT Review Conference.

It has been argued by some that a lowering in the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems is the single step that would do

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most, for the least effort, in decreasing the probability of complete global catastrophe as a result of inadvertent nuclear war brought about by malfunction, miscalculation, or human error.

An article in a 2008 edition of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists entitled 'minimising the risk of human extinction' places it as the highest priority action to be followed immediately by the complete elimination of nuclear weapon systems.

The use, by miscalculation or malfunction, of even a small fraction of the US or Russian strategic arsenals (including 2000 launch-ready, high-alert warheads) would terminate not just civilisation but would threaten the elimination of most humans and many other complex forms of life, as shown by recent (2006) studies.

The incineration of urban areas totalling 100 times the size of Hiroshima's incinerated area in firestorms (possible with as few as 20 modern warheads) would produce a stratospheric soot layer that would cause catastrophic climate change, and catastrophic damage to the Earth's protective ozone layer. Worldwide famine would inevitably follow, claiming in a decade, more victims than all the famines of recorded history combined.

The use of the on-alert arsenals of the US and Russia would cause global ice-age conditions.

The International Commission for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) devotes considerable space in its report to the issue of lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, remarking that the risk of accidental nuclear war is 'not a fantasy but a terrifying possibility'.

The ICNND, the Blix commission of 2006, and the 1996 Canberra Commission all strongly urged the lowering of nuclear weapons system operating status.

A number of UN resolutions include reference to the need to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems. These include the Japan-Australia sponsored resolution on 'United Action Towards the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons', which is voted for by all of the P5, and receives overwhelming support from governments worldwide, and the Chile/Malaysia/New-Zealand/Nigeria/Switzerland sponsored resolution on Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems which was most recently adopted by UNGA last October 157-3. Of the P5, China voted yes to it, Russia abstained while the US, France and the UK voted 'no'.

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However the France and UK 'No' vote was explained by saying that those countries have already lowered the operational readiness of their nuclear weapon systems. (The UK says it did so in 1998, changing the 'notice to fire' of its submarine – based nuclear weapons from 'minutes' to 'days'.) If this is so, the UK and France should use the P5 discussions to persuade the US and Russia to maintain their nuclear forces in a similar state of alert to those of France and the UK. (and China).

We hope and trust that P5 leaders will give this topic the high significance it deserves.

Your attention is also drawn to letters sent by the NGO community to the US Congress and the Russian Duma, and by a number of Russian former senior military and policy experts to the US Congress and Duma Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Signed

John Hallam, People for Nuclear Disarmament NSW Nuclear Flashpoints Project, Sydney, Australia (coordinator)

Steven Starr, PSR,

Colonel Valery Yarynich, (ret- 30 years Soviet missile forces)

International Organisations:

Ambassador Richard Butler AC, Chairman, Middle Powers Initiative,

Jonathan Granoff, President, Global Security Institute, (GSI) NY/Philadelphia

Aaron Tovish, Mayors For Peace 2020 Vision Campaign

Dominique Lalanne, Abolition2000 Europe, Chair, Abolition2000 De-Alerting Working Committee

Alfred L. Marder President, International Association of Peace Messenger Cities,

Tomas Magnusson, Colin Archer, IPB (International Peace Bureau) Geneva,

Angelika Beer, Chair, Parliamentary Network for Conflict Resolution (EWI), Brussels,

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Professor Frederick Meldelsohn AO, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Mel, Aust,

Eryl Court, Unitarian-Universalist United Nations Office, (Church Centre, UN)

Australia:

Dr Jenny Grounds, Medical Association for Prevention of War, (MAPW), Australia,

Fr Claude Mostowik, Bruce Childs, Sydney Peace & Justice Coalition, Co-Convenors, Australia.

Jo Valentine, People for Nuclear Disarmament W.A., Perth Western Australia,

Prof. Peter King, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Sydney University, Sydney, NSW Australia,

Nick Deane, Jo Blackman, Marrickville Peace Group, Marrickville, NSW, Australia,

Don Jarrett, Australian Peace Committee, Adelaide, SA, Australia,

Peter Murphy, SEARCH Foundation, Broadway, Sydney, NSW, Australia,

Brenda Conochie, Environment House, Perth, W.A.,

Pauline Mitchell, CICD Peace Centre, Melb,

Michael Henry, Pax Christi Australia,

Reverend Dr Sandy Yule, Christian Unity Working Group, Uniting Church in Australia, Melb, Vic, Australia,

Adam Breasley, Australian Pugwash Group,

Professor Emerita Chilla Bulbeck, School of Social Sciences, Univ. Adelaide,

Dr Alex Riechel, St Francis Community, Liverpool Street, Sydney, NSW,

Biannca Pace Chair & Executive Director- Ministry for Peace-Australia (Ltd)

Bianca Pace, Vice President, UNAA NSW Division.

Kath Wray, Citizens Wildlife Corridors, Armidale,

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USA

Steven Starr, Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Missouri, USA,

Manuel Padilla, Pax Christi USA National Office in DC, USA,

Manuel Padilla, Abolition 2000 Secretariat, Wash DC, USA,

Rosemarie Pace, Pax Christi Metro New York, NY, USA,

Marylia Kelley, Executive Director, Tri-Valley CARES, Livermore, Calif, USA,

Alice Slater, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation New York, NY, USA,

David Hartsough, Exec Dir, Peaceworkers, San Francisco, Calif, USA,

UK:

Jean Lambert, MEP (Greens) London, UK,

Peter Nicholls, Abolition-2000 UK,

Eric Harley, Vice-Chair, West Midlands CND,

George Farebrother, INLAP/World Court Project UK

Prof. Dave Webb, Chair, Kate Hudson, General Secy, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, London, UK,

Colin Bex, Wessex Regionalists, Wessex, UK,

Colin Bex, Wessex Society, Wessex, UK,

Colin Bex, Campaign for Regional England, UK,

Diana Basterfield, Co-Founder, Ministry for Peace (UK)

Angie Zelter, Co-Founder, Trident Ploughshares UK,

Dr Stuart Parkinson, Scientists for Global Responsibility,(SGR) UK,

Hans Lammerant, Vredesaktie, Belgium,

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Norway:

Prof. Bent Natvig, Chair, Norwegian Pugwash Committee,

Langeland Hallgeir MP, Norway,

Anne Brinch Skaara, Vice-chairman at No to Nuclear Weapons, Oslo, Norway,

Bitte Vatvedt, No To Nuclear Weapons, Norway,

Kirsten Osen, Kurt Hanevik, Ulrich Abildgaard, (Prof Emeritus) IPPNW
Norway, Oslo, John G. Maeland, Chair, IPPNW Norway, Bergen, Norway,

Bodil Ceballos, Member of Parliament (Riksdag Committee on Foreign
Affairs), Green Party, Sweden,

Prof. Vappu Taipale, IPPNW Co-President, Helsinki, Finland,

Angelika Graf MP, Bundestag, (Deputy Speaker on Human Rights and
Humanitarian Aid, Social Democrat Party) Berlin, Germany,

Andreas Pecha, Chair, Austrian Peace Council, Vienna, Austria,

Maria Sotiropoulou, IPPNW Greece,

Thanasis ANAPOLITANOS, Chairman, Mediterranean Anti-Nuclear Watch, GREECE,

Gideon Spiro, Israeli Committee for a Middle-East free From Atomic,
Biological and Chemical Weapons, Israel,

Isa Samandar, Director-General, Popular Development Centre, E
Jerusalem, Palestine,

NZ

Alyn Ware, Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, Wellington, NZ,

Barney Richards, New Zealand Peace Council,

Commander Robert D. Green, Kate Dewes, Disarmament and Security
Centre, Christchurch NZ,

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Bob Rigg, Former Chair, New Zealand National Consultative Committee
for Disarmament (NCCD),

Dr Robert White, Fmr Dir, Centre for Peace Studies, University of Auckland, NZ,

Pat Mc Nair, Health Freedom New Zealand, Hamilton, NZ,

Murray Richard Tingey, International Peace Symbol Promoter, Levin, NZ,

Canada

Steven Staples, Rideau Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada,

Gordon Edwards, Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, (CCNR),
Montreal, Quebec, Canada,

Andrea Levy, Physicians for Global Survival, Ottawa, Canada,

Abraham Weizfeld, Direct Democracy Movement, Montreal, Quebec, Canada,

Rose A. Dyson, Vice-President, Canadian Peace Research Association
(CPRA) Toronto, Canada,

Pascale Fremond, President, Religions for Peace, Montreal, Canada,

Bev Delong, Chair, Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CANW)

Pascale Fremonde, President, Religions for Peace, Montreal, Quebec, Canada,

Susan Stout, Stop War CA, Vancouver, Canada,

Dr Vinay Jindal, Hiroshima Day Coalition, Toronto, Ontario,

Phyllis Creighton, executive, Veterans Against Nuclear Arms (VANA),
Ontario/Quebec Region, Canada

Eryl Court, Canadian Peace Research Association,

Mary-Ellen Francoer, Pax Christi Montreal, Quebec, Canada,

Mauricio Lozano. MD, Vice-President, Salvadoran Physicians for Social
Responsibility, San Salvador, El Salvador

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Paul Saoke, IPPNW Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya,

Russia

Colonel Valery Yarynich (ret) (30 yrs Soviet Missile Forces)

Prof. Sergei Kolesnikov MD, Duma Member, Co-Chair Parliamentary
Network for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND),

Natalia Mironova, Movement for Nuclear Safety, President, Chelyabinsk, Russia,

Herman Spanjaard, MD, IPPNW Netherlands,

Hiro Umebayashi, Special Adviser, Peace Depot, Japan,

Yayoi Tsuchida, assistant general secy, Japan Council against A and H
Bombs (Gensuikyo),

Prof. Takao Takahara, Director, International Politics and Peace
Research, Meiji Gakuin University, Japan,

Wilfred Dcosta, Indian Social Action Forum – INSAF, New Delhi, India,

Dr Ranjith Jayashekhara, Vice-President, Sri Lanka Doctors for Peace
and Development, Sri Lanka,