

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 07 November 2015 18:31 - Last Updated Saturday, 07 November 2015 18:32

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

RESPONSE TO 27 GOVERNMENTS WHO SAY THEY ARE 'UNABLE' TO SUPPORT HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES AND OTHER UNGA RESOLUTIONS

Dear Representatives of Australia, Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Latvia, Iceland, Luxembourg, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Poland, Turkey, Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Albania, Republic of Korea, Croatia, Georgia, Romania, Estonia, Czech Republic and Portugal:

I am responding to the statement before First Committee delivered by Germany on behalf of 27 delegations, who have been unable to support the Humanitarian Consequences, Humanitarian Pledge, and the Ethical Imperatives resolutions. This response does not represent the views of anyone other than People for Nuclear Disarmament. However I am sure you will find many if not most in the NGO community whose views echo one or other of the views expressed here: It is merely that in the interests of getting this to governments quickly, this letter has not gone through any extended process of vetting or signing – on.

I hope to show you that in failing to support these vital resolutions you are making a bad miscalculation, both in terms of the potential fate of civilization and human survival, but also more prosaically in terms of your own security. In failing to support these resolutions you damage, rather than secure, your own security. However, paradoxically and perhaps counter-intuitively, a single minded focus on narrowly defined 'national security', by damaging wider global security, ultimately does more damage to national security than a complete disregarding of national in favor of wider security considerations would have done.

You state that '...we are united in a common purpose: to make concrete progress towards the goal of the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons in a determined but inclusive and pragmatic way'.

This is a goal and a method that itself unites all who do support both the aforementioned resolutions as well as the resolution on the Open Ended Working group operating by UNGA rules of procedure. It is hardly that the 27 governments who felt (wrongly) they could NOT support these resolutions are alone in having a grasp of the practicalities of national security: Others (both NGOs and also over 130 governments) have made calculations about national security and concluded that the 27 governments do NOT have an adequate, reality-based, grasp of what national security really is!

Your statement fails to show that your calculation of what national security even is, is in any way more realistic than the calculations of those who see the Humanitarian Consequences, the Humanitarian Pledge, the Ethical Imperatives, and the Austrian-Mexican OEWG resolution as the best and most realistic way to secure their own (and the worlds) national and global security.

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You state that:

'...we wish to register unequivocally that the grave humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation are clear and not in dispute'.

Indeed so. Yet your actual choices are not those of governments who really take this seriously.

The 'grave humanitarian consequences' of the detonation not of ONE nuclear weapon but of (in the MOST probable current scenarios) over 2000 nuclear warheads are in fact 'beyond grave'. Rather they are existential and apocalyptic.

The use of a single warhead on a single city, catastrophic as that would be, is by no means the most likely nuclear weapons use scenario: There is increasing concern, notably from former commanders of US and Russian missile forces, outlined in a recent letter signed by Generals James Cartwright (US) and Vladimir Dvorkin (Russia), that an actual NATO/Russia nuclear exchange (involving a minimum of 1800/2000 warheads) could be a possibility, absent nuclear risk reduction measures such as those outlined in the Reducing Nuclear Dangers or the Operational Readiness resolution, and once (but alas! No longer) prominent in the United Action/Renewed Determination resolution.

The consequences of a major NATO/Russia exchange would be temperatures below those of the last ice-age for a number of decades, and damage to the ozone layer that would place a question mark over human survival itself.

Surely, the avoidance of precisely such an outcome should take precedence over all other considerations whatsoever, and should itself be regarded as a number one security priority. Going 'soft' on the need for abolition because it might 'enrage rather than engage' nuclear weapons powers or because security considerations must be in some way 'balanced against' the need for abolition is in this context perilous nonsense. Abolition is itself the number one security priority because without it we collectively perish.

You state that:

"...we have all engaged actively and constructively on this important humanitarian consequences dialogue over recent years in the firm belief that this agenda should be a force which unites us and reinforces our common and unshakeable commitment to the ultimate goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons".

Yes, precisely! But the way to a productive dialogue is NOT to allow the possessors of nuclear weapons to argue that they have a security need to have those weapons but to make it abundantly clear that the possession of such weapons is contra international law, is illegal, and is to be marginalized!

In this particular context it may regrettably be necessary to 'enrage' the nuclear weapons possessing governments before commencing an 'engagement' whose terms are 'How are you proposing to eliminate your (illegal) weapons?'

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You state:

“...At the same time, security and humanitarian principles co-exist. Realistic progress can only be achieved if both are given due consideration. This is clearly not the case with the present draft resolutions as they do not take into consideration the distinct security situation(s) of various states”

Security and humanitarian principles do NOT co-exist in counter-position to each other, they are one and the same. Even in the case of conventional arms the very purpose of meaningful security is precisely to ensure that humanitarian principles are not violated by anyone. There just isn't any other legitimate purpose FOR security.

It is precisely the 'distinct security situation(s)' of various states that should impel them to vote FOR the humanitarian resolutions, rather than against them. Voting against these resolutions will improve no-ones security situation, and may well worsen it.

Please note that I am acutely conscious in saying this, of how many of the 27 governments are in Eastern Europe. It is precisely BECAUSE of this, and because of the security situation there, that I say this! A failure to eliminate or to reduce nuclear risks will be perilous indeed for these governments. Failure to support nuclear disarmament and/or risk reduction measures is in our view a catastrophic miscalculation that immeasurably worsens the worst security threat a government can face, namely that of nuclear annihilation. The steps that are being taken – to respond to threats by counter-threats – are exactly the opposite steps to those that must be taken (risk reduction measures pointing to nuclear abolition).

It is indeed vital for the international community to engage in

“a constructive, open, inclusive and genuine dialogue about nuclear disarmament where all points of view are given due respect and acknowledgment”.

However the very best foundation for such a dialogue is a clear acknowledgment that nuclear weapons are now and in reality have always been, illegal, and that their possession let alone use or threat of use is outlawed. The outlawing of nuclear weapons is not a final step that comes AFTER those who possess them have gotten rid of them. It is an essential preliminary to their being eliminated. Unless nuclear weapons ARE marginalized and outlawed we will fail to eliminate them.

The 27 governments who have failed to support the Humanitarian Pledge and Humanitarian Consequences resolutions are making a tragic mistake.

I can only hope that in future years and the sooner the better, this mistake will be corrected.

I note with some pleasure that the Iranian OEWG resolution based on consensus, has been withdrawn, leaving the UNGA-rules based Austrian-Mexican proposal. This is just as well, since a consensus – based OEWG would have become in all likelihood unworkable. For such a group to be workable it must not be possible for it to be blocked by any government or small group of governments, however influential.

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