

Written by John Hallam
Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NSW

AS NUCLEAR DANGERS INCREASE, GOVERNMENTS URGED TO SUPPORT UN NUKE DISARMAMENT MEASURES

Hardly a day goes by without some highly authoritative person, or someone who has 'been' someone, - retired Generals, Secretaries of Defense or Foreign Ministers, not to mention roomfuls of Nobel prizewinners – warning that the potential for a nuclear war between the US/NATO and Russia has increased drastically since the start of the Ukraine crisis, and continues to increase.

In the last couple of days the warnings have come from sources as disparate as former US Secretary of Defense Perry, and a very young, cool, and pretty Russian Strategic Analyst by the name of Polina Tikhonova in a series of utterly chilling articles.

Over a slightly longer period, the warnings have come from former nuclear forces commanders of the US and Russia, Generals Cartwright and Dvorkin.

Increasingly we are hearing calls for nuclear war drills to be reinstated by NATO, while Russian armed forces are already doing just that. Russia has just launched a 'doomsday plane', as well as a massive three-level command center.

'WW-III' was 'trending' on Twitter recently, while two of the most successful (and heavily advertised) recent computer games are set in a 'post-apocalyptic' or WW-III framework.

The 'apocalypse' seems to have come, first creeping and then roaring, back onto the global agenda.

At the same time, a series of intergovernmental meetings have been held in Oslo, Nayarit (Mexico) and Vienna, on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war/nuclear weapons use.

The very agenda of those conferences has made it crystal clear that the large-scale (and not-so-large-scale) use of nuclear weapons will be an event of utterly apocalyptic significance, with a US-Russia conflict killing most humans either immediately or in the ensuing global nuclear winter and ending what we call civilization completely, while even a conflict between India and Pakistan involving as few as 200 relatively small warheads will cause catastrophic

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global climatic consequences.

Cyberspace, and the global financial system as well as most electrical supply networks can be made to disappear by the use of as few as 3-5 very large nuclear warheads exploded in space. A similar effect can be achieved by large – scale solar flare activity.

The urgency to eliminate nuclear weapons has never been clearer.

A series of new resolutions has come up in the United Nations General Assembly, from First Committee, and in addition there are a large number of not so new resolutions that lead toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.

These resolutions seek either to lower the risks of the current situation, for example by lowering the alert status of US and Russian nuclear weapon systems, or seek the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

They include proposals for an 'open ended working group' (OEWG), and resolutions on catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons use and the ethics of nuclear weapons possession, as outlined in the memo to the GA that follows.

Unfortunately, a group of 27 governments (shamefully led by Australia) has decided to come out against these existentially essential proposals saying that they are not 'practical'. However they offer nothing that is in any way more practical, and seem to be making back-door arguments to retain nuclear weapons. Their arguments are refuted in detail in the last of the documents that follow this one.

Now is the time for Governments to grasp the nuclear nettle and – even if it does hurt a little- to give your unstinting support to each and every proposal that seeks to bring closer or to achieve the elimination of weapons which if they are ever used, will surely destroy what we call civilization, and which could well put a question – mark over human survival itself.

John Hallam

People for Nuclear Disarmament

(John is also a co-convenor of the Human Survival Project).

johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au

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jhjohnhallam@gmail.com

61-2-9810-2598

61-2-9319-4296

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT RESOLUTIONS IN FIRST COMMITTEE

'Nuclear Disarmament is a potential Human Survival issue. Voting patterns should reflect that simple brute fact'.

Voting 'yes' to everything (nuclear-weapons-wise) for Human Survival

Dear Delegate to the General Assembly and First Committee:

I wish to draw your attention to a large number of important draft nuclear disarmament resolutions coming up in First Committee and the General Assembly in New York. The newest of these resolutions spring from the series of conferences on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of nuclear weapons that took place in Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna, the last in Dec2014, and the discussions and information revealed in those conferences can be seen in all of them.

They are:

--Draft Resolution on the "Humanitarian Pledge for the Prohibition and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons"

--Draft Resolution on Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons

--Draft Resolution "Taking forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations"

--Draft Resolution 'Ethical Imperatives for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World'

--Draft Resolution 'Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear Weapons-Free World'

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

--Draft Resolution 'Towards a Nuclear Weapon-Free World – Accelerating the Implementation of Nuclear Disarmament Commitments'.

There are in addition to these 'new' resolutions, a number of other worthy resolutions, every single one of which should be supported by every government, regardless of bloc loyalty or origin. Some of these resolutions are 'hardy perennials' that have come up annually for a number of years or decades.

These include the ICJ followup resolution, the NAM resolution sponsored by Myanmar, and the Indian Reducing Nuclear Dangers Draft Resolution.(A/C 1/70/L.20) Some are also new or relatively new, notably the resolution on followup to the 2013 High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament.(A/C 1/70/L.15), though versions of that resolution were adopted in 2013 and 2014. Widespread and 'out-of-bloc' support (ie support from quarters other than NAM) for all of these resolutions would be most helpful.

The ICJ followup resolution is of particular significance because not only has it received over the years some 'out of bloc' support, but the resolution focuses on the unanimous part of the 1996 ICJ decision to negotiate for complete nuclear disarmament. The ICJ noted in its 1996 advisory opinion that the effects of nuclear weapons use cannot be contained in space or time.

The new Humanitarian Pledge and Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolutions state repeatedly and unequivocally that the use of nuclear weapons especially in large numbers, would potentially threaten human survival itself, and would definitely threaten the survival of civilization.

Thus, the 3rd para of the Humanitarian Pledge Draft Resolution states that:

“Understanding that the immediate, mid-and long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion are significantly graver than it was understood in the past and will not be constrained by national borders but have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity,”

and again:

'Affirming that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances,'

While according to the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution,

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Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

'Recalling also that the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-1) stressed in 1978 that "nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization",'

and:

'Emphasizing that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world and have deep implications for human survival, for the environment, for socio-economic development, for our economies and for the health of future generations

Stresses that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances;'

Annika Thunborg of the Swedish delegation, a co-sponsor of the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution, noted that:

"We understand that some delegations have problems with the notion that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances. But we ask ourselves, when would it be in the interest of humanity that nuclear weapons are used, under what circumstances? The resolution tries to forge consensus around the notion that it is in the interest of all states that use doesn't occur under any circumstances. Don't we all share this common interest?"

Indeed so! Delegations that have 'problems' should be asked not only 'just when is it in humanity's interest to use nuclear weapons?' But the deeper question 'just what considerations could possibly trump human survival, given that this is potentially at least, what is at stake?'

In somewhat optimistic contrast to Annika's statement (and maybe having asked just those questions) it is notable that even some governments who have been in the past quite averse to language about nuclear weapons as a threat to human survival have now used such language. Thus, even Australia (!!), in a statement on behalf of some NATO and eastern European countries, notes that:

'...it is in the interests of the very survival of humanity that nuclear war must never occur'.

Ambassador Quinn made a similar notation in Australia's own national statement. We heartily welcome the Australian Governments conversion to this discourse, with all its implications for other Governments and for First Committee as a whole.

A continuing theme of The Human Survival Project (as our name suggests) is that large scale

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

nuclear weapons use would indeed threaten Human Survival. We therefore welcome the increasingly widespread recognition from so many governments and large (sometimes very large) groups of governments, that this is indeed the case.

It may not be absolutely certain that in the event of large-scale nuclear weapons use, all humans would definitely perish over the following few decades from starvation and by literally freezing in the dark. However it is highly probable from the information shared at the Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna Conferences that what we now call 'civilization' would cease to function even if a very few warheads were used. It is highly probable that a subcontinental nuclear war could provoke global famine, and that a larger scale nuclear weapons use such as between Russia and NATO, would, as during the cold war, both completely destroy civilization and would put a question mark at least, behind human survival. Human extinction could not be ruled out: it is 'on the menu'.

That the most immediate threat to humans as a species comes from ourselves via the nuclear arsenals of the largest nuclear weapons possessors is hardly a new idea, (first suggested in 1945, and reiterated in the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto, as well as in various UN declarations) but it is, alas! More true than ever, as reaffirmed by the Evans Commission, and most recently Oslo Nayarit and Vienna.

What is also made clear in the Humanitarian Pledge Draft Resolution is that the danger of large-scale (and other) nuclear weapons use is growing.

This became obvious last January when the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Advisory Board (consisting of a dozen or so Nobel prizewinners) moved the hands of the 'doomsday clock' from 5 minutes to midnight to three minutes to midnight, a position it had not been in since 1983, 'the year the world nearly ended' (an event now highly appropriately commemorated on Sept26, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons').

Thus, the draft resolution on the Humanitarian Pledge notes that:

“Aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability, the ongoing modernization of nuclear weapon arsenals in States possessing nuclear weapons, and the role that is attributed to nuclear weapons in the nuclear doctrines of such states,...

The currently growing risks of actual nuclear weapons use are reflected in the very necessary measures canvassed in the Humanitarian Consequences Draft Resolution. They are also canvassed in the 'Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations' draft

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Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

resolution. These resolutions include measures to actually reduce those risks, including in particular measures to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapons, and to decrease their salience in security doctrines. Countries with 'extended deterrence' relationships (such as those listed in Ambassador Quinn's statement) should of course play their part in reducing such salience by withdrawing from arrangements of 'extended deterrence', arrangements that not only decrease rather than increase real security, but which also hamstring the ability to advocate consistently for the elimination of nuclear weapons. At the same time, even nuclear alliances could be constructively used/transformed to lobby nuclear weapon states to do the right thing and to cease to be any longer nuclear weapon states.

A resolution that would do much to reduce nuclear dangers is of course, the 'Reducing Nuclear Dangers' Draft Resolution, sponsored by India. In addition, lowering operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems will come up at this First Committee in a number of other resolutions notably 'Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations', in the NAM resolution (not yet tabled as of the writing of this memo), and hopefully in the (not yet tabled) Renewed Determination Draft Resolution. I gather that the Operational readiness resolution sponsored by NZ, Switzerland, Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria and Sweden will not come up in 2015 but only in 2016. This is a pity as it has gathered increasing and well-deserved support from across traditional blocs.(last adopted 166-4). Given the increasing crescendo of warnings of the real danger of accidental nuclear war by credible commentators such as Generals Cartwright and Dvorkin, and most recently, former US secretary of defence Perry, support for de-alerting whether via Operational Readiness or Reducing Nuclear Dangers is more vital than ever.

Both India's Reducing Nuclear Dangers and the Myanmar NAM resolution tended in past years to languish in the so-called 'NAM ghetto' (a 'mere' 2/3-3/4 of all the governments that there are).

This lack of cross-bloc support is completely without justification. In addition it is frequently said of Reducing Nuclear Dangers that some governments refrain from voting for it because it comes from a party (India) that can be seen as helping (together with Pakistan) to put the subcontinent onto a nuclear hair-trigger basis, while preaching nuclear restraint and risk reduction for others. This is an argument that reflects nothing on the actual merits of the risk reduction measures contained in that resolution, and the point could be much more constructively dealt with in an EoV together with a 'YES' vote. Who puts the resolution up should be neither here nor there. The actual content and merits of the resolution should be central.

'Yes' votes from non-NAM, to resolutions normally considered to be the exclusive province of NAM, in the current atmosphere of urgency over nuclear risks would send a signal that desperately needs to be sent, namely that reducing nuclear risks transcends bloc loyalty. In addition it is this writers 'naive' belief that resolutions should be evaluated strictly on their

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Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

obvious 'as stated' textual merits and taken at face value (and that face value insisted upon). As long as a resolution is more-or-less along constructive and helpful lines it is worthy of support, whatever minor points we may have reservations about (after all that is what EoVs are for.) More use of EoVs (and more yes votes) should be made. Above all I make a plea to all and sundry for less reading 'between' the lines and more reading of what the lines actually do say.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has said that in order to actually be effective in advocating for nuclear disarmament it is necessary to 'engage but not enrage' the nuclear weapons powers. This argument is effectively endorsed by a number of governments but cannot in reality be used to argue against the Humanitarian Pledge or a ban. Countering (or using in another way) the 'Bishop argument' is vital to the considerations of ALL governments in First Committee, not just Australia, especially as far as the Humanitarian Pledge is concerned.

It is most certainly necessary to 'engage' the nuclear weapons states. It would be wonderful to see exactly such engagement, engagement aimed at pushing them to genuinely fulfill their art VI NPT obligations, -really taking place by not only US allies/NATO, but by Russian allies. And bluntly – if the nuclear weapons states are going to be persuaded really to let go of their nuclear arsenals a little 'engagement' also, or at least some pretty stiff and real pressure will have to be applied. Finally, nuclear disarmament must be treated as the survival issue it really is. The Australian statement gives lip service to this but fails to point to any way forward to achieving zero sooner rather than later.

We urge NATO governments especially, precisely to engage the nuclear weapons states with the aim of persuading them to eliminate their nuclear arsenals as per their already existing but unfulfilled obligations. The list of governments behind the Australian statement would do well to 'engage' their nuclear-armed allies with a view to getting them to eliminate their nuclear arsenals – and this is precisely not happening. Such engagement would most profitably commence by the signing of the Humanitarian Pledge, and engagement in an OEWG open to all and block-able by none.

Another argument from the 'Bishop' stable is that 'there are no short cuts'. Nobody ever suggested there were. A Ban or NWC or other instrument outlawing nuclear weapons will not lead to instant nirvana and no-one has ever suggested it would do so. But the stigmatizing, marginalizing and explicitly outlawing of what is after all in reality an already illegal weapon system is an absolutely essential step.

When the crunch comes, it has to be emphasized that the survival of humans as a species and of Civilization (as well as most complex land-based living things) has to be regarded as a priority that simply trumps all possible other priorities. There simply CANNOT be a more

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

important priority than this. Human survival (and thus the explicit outlawing of nuclear weapons) must be regarded as in itself a core national security objective for ALL governments, including the 28 governments whose names appear on the Australian statement, who, should the ultimate catastrophe take place and nuclear weapons be used in Europe and globally, will all become toast.

Of course the nuclear weapons states will not immediately sign onto a nuclear weapons ban. Such a ban remains a vital tool in pushing them to cease to be nuclear weapons states as per their art-VI NPT obligations.

Of course the nuclear weapons states will try to make an open-ended working group operate by a consensus that they can then block. Of course they will have to be dragged kicking and screaming into elimination of nuclear weapons by ban or convention or other means. Of course their efforts to white-ant an OEWG by using the consensus rule will have to be resisted.(and that is why use of a consensus rule as opposed to UNGA rules of procedure is unacceptable).

But that does not mean that allies of nuclear -armed states will have no influence if they support a ban, convention, or an OEWG as these resolutions suggest. Quite the contrary. Such support would be game-changing. This is exactly why a nuclear weapons ban and/or a nuclear weapons convention is so vitally important.

All governments should wholeheartedly support these draft resolutions. In doing so you are helping reduce the likelihood of complete global catastrophe, an act of deepest ethical significance. And the arguments of Bishop and similar others are simply without foundation.

Finally, I would like to make the rather obvious point that at least amongst nuclear disarmament draft resolutions, there is simply NO draft resolution that any government should not be supporting! A possible title for this memo might have been 'why your government should vote yes to everything'!

There are however a bundle of entirely spurious reasons that are ladled out by various parties for NOT voting in particular for resolutions that emanate from the NAM group. To the author of this memo, after participating for nine years in First Committee and NPT meetings this remains incomprehensible and perverse.

This kind of reflexive thinking (or rather, non-thinking) is entirely unhelpful in confronting a potential catastrophe that, should it (God forbid) ever eventuate, will affect all of us regardless of what diplomatic bloc we happen to be part of.

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Its also worth pointing out that while for example, NATO, East-European and other US allies refrain from voting with NAM, NAM does NOT return the compliment, and the most widely supported disarmament resolutions such as Renewed Determination and New Agenda are carried on the NAM vote. I therefore return to a slightly earlier theme that non-NAM support for 'NAM' initiatives such as reducing Nuclear Dangers or the NAM resolution itself would send hugely important and potentially game-changing signals that need very much to be sent. Nuclear disarmament is truly a human survival issue. The voting behaviors of Governments – all of you – need to reflect that simple brute fact.

John Hallam

People for Nuclear Disarmament

Human Survival Project

johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au

jhallam@gmail.com

61-2-9810-2598

fax 61-2-9699-9182

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

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Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

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.

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.

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'. They are existential and apocalyptic.

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

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?'

You state:

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 05 December 2015 13:32 -

“...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.

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johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au

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Fax 61-2-9699-9182