

Letter to PM Morrison on Sept 26 UN High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament

Written by John Hallam
Wednesday, 14 August 2019 20:32 -

Â PRIME MINISTER SCOTT MORRISON

CC

MARISE PAYNE, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SENATOR PENNY WONG

ANTHONY ALBANESE

RE: SEPT 26TH HIGH LEVEL UN MEETING ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Dear Prime Minister Scott Morrison,

September 26th is the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. On that day a High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament will take place, at which Governments will be represented at the very highest level possible â preferably at Ministerial or Prime Ministerial level. Representation of Australia at that meeting by either yourself or Foreign Minister Marise Payne would be most appropriate.

It is commonly recognized amongst experts on nuclear weapons, and increasingly amongst the wider public, that the real risk of widespread use of nuclear weapons, an event that would likely end what we call civilization, is as high right now as it has been since 1945. In January 2018 the Doomsday Clock set its hands at 2 minutes to figurative 'midnight', which is as close as it has ever been. The clock hands are moved by a committee of Nobels and nuclear weapons experts. Since the moving of the clock hands matters of nuclear risk have only worsened, and the only reason for the clock hands not to be moved further is that it is running out of minutes.

Back in 1983, at half past midnight Moscow time, the world came close to ending (which nearly took place twice that rather scary year), as Soviet surveillance satellites mistook the reflections of sunlight off vertical high clouds directly over North Dakota for US ICBM launches. Fortunately the officer on watch at the time, Colonel Stan Petrov, thought there was 'a mistake somewhere' and declined to take actions that would have resulted in the launch over over 10,000 nuclear warheads at the US and its allies including Australia. Colonel Petrovs actions are re-enacted in the movie 'The Man Who Saved the World'.

30 years later, in 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution making Sept 26th the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear

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Weapons, <https://www.un.org/en/events/nuclearweaponelimination/> and establishing a high level meeting at the level of Prime Ministers, Foreign and Defense Ministers or Ambassadorial level on that day. NGOs also participate prominently in this meeting, as they do in a number of other UN disarmament meetings. The event will be live-streamed on <http://webtv.un.org/>

As it is above all the ACCIDENTAL outbreak of nuclear war via miscalculation, mistake, malfunction, or malware, (as on Sept26th 1983) that remains the most probable route to a potentially civilization-ending catastrophe, Australia's modest efforts on nuclear risk reduction are of key importance. These worthy efforts need to be stepped up and given a much higher profile. Risk reduction measures include no-first-use commitments, lowering of operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems and increased decision-making times, better or resumed military to military communications, and implementation of a repeated commitment to establish a joint US-Russia nuclear risk reduction/data exchange centre in Moscow.

As abolitionists we would of course, urge Australia to sign, ratify, and to urge others including above all nuclear weapon states to sign at ratify, the nuclear ban treaty (TPNW).

Risk reduction is however both a pressing (existential) immediate priority, one that is appropriately talked about at a meeting such as the Sept 26th UN High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, and one to which Australia has made some low-key but potentially important contribution.

Your own contribution, as Australia's Prime Minister, would be to be there, by your presence giving this important meeting the profile it deserves and highlighting Australia's contribution to risk reduction.

I do hope that you will be able by your presence to give this very important UN meeting the priority it deserves.

John Hallam

UN Nuclear Disarmament Campaigner People for Nuclear Disarmament

Chair, Human Survival Project

Co-Chair, Abolition 2000 Nuclear Risk Reduction Working Group

Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND) Coordinator, Australia.

johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au

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jhjohnhallam@gmail.com

johnh@pnnd.org

61-411-854-612

UN Statement on International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

<https://www.un.org/en/events/nuclearweaponelimination/>

Achieving global nuclear disarmament is one of the oldest goals of the United Nations. It was the subject of the General Assembly's first resolution in 1946, which established the Atomic Energy Commission, which was dissolved in 1952, with a mandate to make specific proposals for the control of nuclear energy and the elimination of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction. The United Nations has been at the forefront of many major diplomatic efforts to advance nuclear disarmament since. In 1959, the General Assembly endorsed the objective of general and complete disarmament. In 1978, the first Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament further recognized that nuclear disarmament should be the priority objective in the field of disarmament. Every United Nations Secretary-General has actively promoted this goal.

Yet, today nearly 14,000 nuclear weapons remain. Countries possessing such weapons have well-funded, long-term plans to modernize their nuclear arsenals. More than half of the world's population still lives in countries that either have such weapons or are members of nuclear alliances. While the number of deployed nuclear weapons has appreciably declined since the height of the Cold War, not one nuclear weapon has been physically destroyed pursuant to a treaty. In addition, no nuclear disarmament negotiations are currently underway.

Meanwhile, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence persists as an element in the security policies of all possessor states and many of their allies. The international arms-control framework that contributed to international security since the Cold War, acted as a brake on the use of nuclear weapons and advanced nuclear disarmament, has come under increasing strain. Most recently, on 2 August 2019, the United States' withdrawal spelled the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, through which the United States and the Russian Federation had previously committed to eliminating an entire class of nuclear missiles.

Frustration has been growing amongst Member States regarding what is perceived as the slow pace of nuclear disarmament. This frustration has been put into sharper focus with growing concerns about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of even a single nuclear weapon, let alone a regional or global nuclear war.

The General Assembly commemorates 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This Day provides an occasion for the world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as a priority. It provides an opportunity to

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educate the public - and their leaders - about the real benefits of eliminating such weapons, and the social and economic costs of perpetuating them. Commemorating this Day at the United Nations is especially important, given its universal membership and its long experience in grappling with nuclear disarmament issues. It is the right place to address one of humanity's greatest challenges; achieving the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/32 and subsequent resolutions, the purpose of the International Day is to further the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons through enhancing public awareness and education about the threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons and the necessity for their total elimination. In so doing, it is hoped that these activities will help to mobilize new international efforts towards achieving the common goal of a of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres