

High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament

Written by John Hallam

Wednesday, 28 March 2018 14:56 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 March 2018 14:58

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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

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UN HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
AUSTRALIAN GOVT SHOULD PARTICIPATE AT HIGHEST LEVEL

The Australian Government, and all Governments, especially those of the 'official' Nuclear Weapons States, and of other states possessing nuclear weapons, should participate at the highest level in the High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, whose opening, administrative, session starts March28 at the UN in New York. The main session of the conference will take place May14-16 in New York.

The great merit of the High Level Conference is that it is relatively 'open ended', and that it is not tied to any one specific disarmament agenda. This means that there is no excuse for the nuclear weapons states and other states with nuclear weapons not to attend it.

It also means that it can consider not only ways and means to eliminate nuclear weapons, but, critically importantly, ways to reduce nuclear risks in the short to immediate term. This is literally of existential importance, given that current risks of an (accidental or otherwise) nuclear apocalypse are, according to many authoritative sources, as high as they have ever been, ever.

Ways to reduce the risk of us all being toast over the short term include lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, no-first-use postures, improved transparency and military to military communication, and the establishment of the Joint Data Centre agreed five times between the US and Russian governments and never implemented.

As the High Level Conference is not welded to any one specific path to a nuclear weapons free world, governments that reject the Prohibition Treaty can at least join with other governments and discuss other ways to eliminate nuclear weapons and to reduce risk -at least until they see the light and embrace the Prohibition Treaty.

Australia and all other governments, whether or not they support the TPNW should embrace this nonpartisan, pragmatic initiative to reduce risk and move toward nuclear abolition.

In the meantime, at tomorrows administrative meeting, governments should open the main meeting to all NGOs, not merely those registered with ECOSOC, in line with the practice at all other UN meetings including those on nuclear disarmament.

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TO ALL DELEGATES TO THE 14—16 MAY NY HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Dear High Level Conference Delegate:

>On January 25, 2018, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 2 minutes to Midnight, indicating the now frighteningly high risk of nuclear weapons conflicts. 'Midnight' in this context indicates an event sequence, in this case nuclear war, that could/would end civilisation as we understand it, and place human survival itself in doubt.

>2 Minutes is the closest that the Doomsday Clock- hands have been to 'midnight' since the days of the early cold-war in 1953, when the first US and Soviet thermonuclear tests took place and there were active US plans to conduct pre-emptive strikes against the USSR. Even in 1983, marked by two incidents in which 'the world nearly ended', the Doomsday Clock hands were only at 3 minutes to 'midnight'.

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>Any use of nuclear weapons would of course have catastrophic human, economic and environmental consequences. The use of just a small fraction of the 14,000 nuclear weapons in the world's stockpiles could end civilisation as we know it. Indeed, technological civilisation and global financial and communications systems would be crippled by as few as five large nuclear warheads exploded in outer space. A few dozen powerful warheads (or a larger number of smaller warheads as in an India-Pakistan conflict) used to incinerate large cities would create global climatic effects that could kill as many as 2 billion from starvation. The use of thousands of warheads would almost certainly end civilisation.

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>The elevated risk of nuclear war has been the subject of statements and warnings by not only the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists with its advisory board of nobel prize-winners, but also of William Perry, former US secretary of defence, former commanders of US and Russian nuclear forces, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Pope Francis.

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>Mikhail Gorbachev writes :

>"Things have come to a point where we must ask: Where is the United Nations? Where is its Security Council, its Secretary General? Isn't it time to convene an emergency session of the General Assembly or a meeting of the Security Council at the level of heads of state? I am convinced that the world is waiting for such an initiative."

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>This makes United Nations High-Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, scheduled to take place at the UN in NY from May 14-16, 2018, of utmost importance. The May 14-16 High Level Conference at the UN could see itself as fulfilling precisely such a role. The Conference should see its mandate as having the urgency that Mr Gorbachev does.

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>This conference will be a unique opportunity both for governments to discuss broader issues of nuclear disarmament/abolition, nonproliferation, and the now existentially critical issues of nuclear (war) risk reduction.

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>We call on all UN member governments to participate in the UN High Level Conference at the highest level, and to take action at the conference to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons being used, and to advance the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

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>This could include signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted at the United Nations on July 7, 2017. This is an important step but it is not by any means the only step. Other steps toward elimination/abolition of nuclear weapons are also vital and, in the current context of explicit threats of nuclear weapons use, risk reduction measures are of immediate existential importance.

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>Such risk reduction measures could include:

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>--adopting policies never to initiate a nuclear war, (no-first-use pledge),

>--reducing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems,

>--measures to increase transparency in nuclear posture and deployment,

>--increased military-to-military communication, including the creation of the Joint Data Exchange Centre (JDEC) mutually agreed on five times by the US and Russian governments but never implemented,

>--reducing numbers of nuclear weapons, and replacing reliance on nuclear deterrence with safer and more sustainable approaches to security, emphasising common security, conflict resolution and the rule of law.

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>In addition, though this is not directly related to the High Level Conference, it would be highly desirable for there to be a resolution in the General Assembly at the end of the year (First Committee), highlighting the currently elevated risk to humanity and to civilisation posed by the increased risk of nuclear weapons use. We encourage governments to give this possibility deep consideration.

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>NGO Participation in High Level Conference

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>We also call on all Governments to support the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other representatives of civil society in the High-Level Conference. At the moment, the UN is restricting such participation to only NGOs that already have ECOSOC accreditation. This has not been the case with other HLCs of the UNGA. This arbitrarily restrictive policy risks undercutting the progress that has been made in recent year (within the NPT review process and at the UN Negotiating Conference for a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) to bring disarmament fora up to the standard of UN fora on other topics of public interest.

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>Most disarmament NGOs are accredited at the UN through the Department of Public Information, and not ECOSOC. They were allowed to participate in the other disarmament meetings, (such as a recent High Level Conference on Oceans) but will be barred from the UN High Level Conference on nuclear disarmament, unless this restrictive provision is scrapped at the March 28 organisational meeting for the Conference.

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>Thank you
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>John Hallam
>Human Survival Project/People for Nuclear Disarmament, Sydney Australia,
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>
>Alyn Ware, Co-Chair of the World Future Council Peace and Disarmament Commission.
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>Aaron Tovish, Zona Libre, Mexico