

Mayors for Peace Speaker, Aaron Tovish, International Director of the 2020 Vision Campaign

Thanks to IPPNW for organizing the physicians of this world to prevent nuclear war.

Thanks for the Swiss Government for helping the doctors hold their World Congress and for demonstrating leadership on these vital issues on the international stage.

Friends, there is no doubt: more momentum is building for a nuclear-weapon-free world than ever before.

Many of the old obstacles remain, but we have new allies and new possibilities.

It is our task – indeed our profound duty – to make the most of this window of opportunity.

If we do not, the window will close. Might it open again? Yes, but there is also the possibility that the catastrophe described so well by Dr. Helfand may permanently end all hope.

We need to move quickly and decisively.

The positive incentive is that there is a vacuum to be filled: the off-year in the five-year NPT Review cycle. If we move quickly and decisively, we can fill that vacuum; we can define the agenda for 2011.

The NPT RevCon agreed upon over 60 Action Points; if pursued in good faith, we will have another five-year installment of nonproliferation. That is no small thing in today's dangerous world.

But we all know – and I do not mean just us here at this meeting – that the single most important action point was missing: commencement of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention.

So how can we fill the 2011 vacuum with global attention to the supreme task of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free world?

The Mayors for Peace Hiroshima Conference on the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons by the Year 2020 has made this suggestion which I commend to your most serious consideration, and I quote:

“[G]overnments that have expressed their desire for a comprehensive legal process, in partnership with like-minded NGOs, should convene a special disarmament conference in 2011 to facilitate the start of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention.”

We are talking here about a preparatory session, but we did not use the word ‘preparatory’ for a very good reason: it is not evident yet by what means negotiations will get underway. The overriding task of this special conference will be to identify and unite around a specific course of action that ensures the commencement of negotiations.

That course of action should: (1) begin impressively and (2) have staying power. An impressive beginning will ensure that no nations can dismiss it as an irrelevant side show; staying power will be necessary to gradually but inexorably drawing all the key players into the process.

The 2011 special conference will be outside the UN system, but it will be up to the participating governments to decide whether to pursue negotiations inside or outside of the UN system – or perhaps a creative combination of the two is possible.

In my recent consultations with ambassadors in Vienna, I have found a high degree of receptivity to this suggestion. I have pointed to three levels of engagement countries could assume in the special conference. Of the 16 country I consulted, ALL thought it important that their country at least be well represented at the special conference. About half thought that it would be appropriate for their country to be among the circle of countries organizing the conference. And several thought their country should seriously consider the possibility of hosting the conference.

Now they were mainly “governments that have expressed their desire for a comprehensive legal process” so a positive reception was not entirely unexpected. But in my long experience a 45 minute meeting with an ambassador is a good indication of potential for cooperation. I am pleased to report to you that with just one exception these meeting ran over an hour and a half.

In short, my friends: the tide is with us. It is time to set sail!

Remember the window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely. In fact, it could close rather quickly. For example, the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will shift from Egypt to Iran at the end of 2011. Regardless of one might think of the Iran nuclear program, I think it is evident that cooperation between countries in the North and South on nuclear abolition will be considerable more difficult with Iran at the helm of the NAM. It is crucial to have that cooperation firmly established while Egypt is still NAM President.

Another factor, is that as 2012 approaches the projected Middle East Conference on creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that region will increasingly consume the energy of diplomats – and many NGOs. This is a worthy project but it cannot be allowed to crowd out the task of commencing a comprehensive process for establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

It is therefore vital that we challenge government to act quickly and decisively by 2011. We must keep this window open. And we can.

But to do this we must be focused. Our resources are not plentiful; our numbers are still small compare to the immensity of the task. I know each one of you is already immersed in one or more demanding projects each one worthy in its own right. But I ask you to keep your eyes on the big prize. We must be pulling together on this one.

IPPNW has done a great service to the international movement by launching the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. We need an effective means of communicating and coordinating over the coming months and years. ICAN has experience some growing pains, but I am sure it can mature into an

organization that is attractive not only for the standard anti-nuclear-weapons groups to join, but also humanitarian organization, climate change groups, and many others.

Governments understand that their diplomacy can change the thinking of the nuclear-armed states only so much. The heavy lifting has to be done by civil society in the nuclear-armed states.

What the governments can do, and hopefully will do, is offer a sane international point of reference for those working to transform the debate within the nuclear-armed states. When civil society activists – and I include mayors, and parliamentarians, in this category – can point to the initiative of many countries to commence work now on the complete elimination of the nuclear threat, it makes their task of getting their fellow citizens to stop debating precisely how many billions of dollars to spend on this or that weapons system and to see the day in near when NOTHING will need to be spent of ANY of those systems. And wouldn't that be SO much more preferable?!

But will this international point of reference be enough to transform the internal debates in the nuclear-armed states? I wish rationality were the greatest force in world, because if it were then such an alternative would be irresistible to all but the most benighted.

The truth is without something new, the debate will probably continue going around in circles indefinitely with the net result being that the status quo will prevail. Recall here Secretary Clinton's 'vision' of nuclear disarmament in 'some century.'

Fortunately we have the new element. An extraordinary sea change has occurred in the last decade in popular opinion: people everywhere are accepting a responsibility to protect the world's environment from the damaging impact of human activity.

They need to hear Ira's message of nuclear famine!

Nuclear deterrence is nothing short of reckless endangerment of everything we have ever strived to create in human civilization. Through catastrophic climate change, in just one decade, it would inflict suffering on humanity comparable to ALL the suffering from war, famine, and pestilence in recorded history.

The most recent US nuclear posture review was done in willful ignorance of this new scientifically-based knowledge. That is not only reckless endangerment but also gross negligence of the highest order. There is, unfortunately, no evidence any other nuclear-armed state has behave more responsibly.

We need to get this word out in a big way. It will not be easy; people do not like to hear "inconvenient truths."

I am here to tell you that mayors are here to help. Why? It should be obvious. It is incinerated cities that will trigger the climatic catastrophe. This is like adding insult to injury. Not only will several cities be totally obliterated by nuclear war – or accident; but the possibility of recovery will be lost in the ensuing breakdown of modern civilization.

Thanks in part to IPPNW, Mayors for Peace has grown in leaps and bounds in the leaps and bounds since the 2020 Vision Campaign was launched seven years ago. City leaders understand intuitively that nuclear weapons are weapons of terror – city busters. Our 4000-plus network of cities will actively educate their three-quarter of a billion citizens about this fundamental threat to humanity. Like doctors, they will also press their governments to pay close attention to this vital information, particularly those whose nuclear policies are utterly fail to take this vital information into account.

Mayors and doctors are the ideal conveyors of this new information.

This is a huge responsibility, but I am sure we can rise to it. Just as I am sure non-nuclear-weapon states will rise to their responsibility to make the alternative real.

This is the one-two punch that will break through the obstacles to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Victory is within our grasp: a victory for the future of humanity.

When IPPNW holds its World Congress in Hiroshima in 2012, we will be able, I am confident, to celebrate that the negotiation on the nuclear weapons convention have either begun or are on the international diplomatic calendar.

Of course, there will be much work to do nonetheless. A top priority for the negotiators will be to agree on a timeline for the work, including a target date for actual establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free world. Just as the 2011 window gives our work a sense of urgency today; governments will need a sense of urgency as they tackle the details of establish a nuclear-weapon-free world. It will give everyone faith in the good faith of others to really get the job done in this decade – not in some century!

Hiroshima is working on a bid for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. It aims for the Games to be a celebration of peace in the true Olympic tradition. Specifically it will be a celebration of nuclear disarmament. Among us on that great day will be the elderly survivors of the 1945 atomic bombing. These brave people were only young children in 1945. Wouldn't it be great to know that no young children will have to experience – or even have to FEAR experiencing – what they did?

So let's seize the day! For their sake and ours, let rise to the challenge and promise of the moment. Together we really can do it!