



Many people.
One future.
Zero nuclear weapons.

The Growing Support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention: States, Civil Society and the Public

Remarks delivered on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, UN Headquarters, 5 March 2010

Tim Wright*

Thank you all for taking the time to be here to mark this important occasion. Today's anniversary is a good opportunity for us to ask ourselves whether we're satisfied, 40 years after the entry into force of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, with the progress that has been made towards its implementation. We're all well aware of the continuing risks of nuclear proliferation, and the sobering reality that there are more than 23,000 nuclear weapons remaining in the world, many of them on hair-trigger alert.

It is also an opportunity for states and NGOs to start sharing ideas, before the NPT Review Conference, on how best to achieve a world without these instruments of terror. That surely should be among the highest aspirations of all nations. As John has just noted, perhaps the most realistic way to achieve the NPT's core promise — of a nuclear-weapon-free world — would be to negotiate a nuclear weapons convention, backed by a strong system of verification.

He has already outlined why it is achievable, and how it would work. Now I would like to take a moment to describe the growing support worldwide for this comprehensive approach to nuclear disarmament. As John mentioned, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has included the nuclear weapons convention in the first point of his five-point plan on nuclear disarmament, in which he urges all states to fulfil their longstanding obligation to disarm.

And each year, in the UN General Assembly, more than 120 states vote in favour of a resolution on the illegality of nuclear weapons, which calls for the commencement of negotiations leading to the early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention. Certain states maintain that it is premature to be considering negotiations, but this position by definition cannot last forever. Slowly we are seeing a number of such states accept that now is the time.

Last year the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament — which is a joint initiative of the Australian and Japanese governments, who are both represented

* Tim Wright is NWC Project Coordinator for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

here today — released its main report, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats*, in which it stated that ‘there is no reason why detailed further work on [a nuclear weapons convention] should not commence now, and with government support’.

Its precursor, the Blix commission on weapons of mass destruction, had made a similar recommendation three years earlier. Its report, *Weapons of Terror*, sought to dispel the myth that a nuclear weapons convention is unrealistic and premature: it said that such a treaty could be reached through ‘careful, sensible and practical measures’.

And today, unlike just five years ago, a majority of non-government organizations working in the field of nuclear disarmament have adopted the nuclear weapons convention as their key demand. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons — which is an umbrella campaign — was launched at the NPT Preparatory Committee session in 2007 with the specific purpose of promoting negotiations for a convention.

Last week, when I sent a bulletin out to all of our national campaign contacts seeking updates on their efforts to promote a convention, I received responses from people in about 40 countries, demonstrating the breadth of support. In the lead-up to the Review Conference, they’re planning meetings with foreign ministers, online petitions, Facebook and Twitter campaigns, even a fashion show in the Philippines — all urging states to negotiate a nuclear weapons convention.

John’s organization, IALANA, is obviously fully committed to the convention idea as well. In fact, it helped to develop a detailed model convention to show that a nuclear-weapon-free world really is possible, so long as there’s political will. And Ray’s organization, WILPF, has helped to stimulate discussion on the need for such a treaty in the various disarmament forums.

The Mayors for Peace network — which now consists of 3500 cities in 134 countries — has adopted the convention as part of its 2020 Vision Campaign; and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament have promoted the convention in dozens of national legislatures across the world.

We also know from opinion polls conducted in 21 countries in 2008 for the Global Zero campaign that the overwhelming majority of people worldwide support the idea of a binding, verifiable nuclear weapons convention. In the United States, 77 per cent are in favour, and just 20 per cent are opposed. And in Russia 69 per cent are in favour, and just 14 per cent are opposed.

Most respondents in every one of the other six nuclear-armed states where polling was conducted also support a nuclear weapons convention, including 81 per cent of respondents in the United Kingdom, where the government is currently assessing whether to renew its fleet of nuclear-armed Trident submarines.

The average support globally for a nuclear weapons convention is estimated at 76 per cent, indicating that governments have a clear popular mandate to commence and conclude negotiations. I do hope that the democratic will of the people does count for something. Civil society is under no illusion that the journey to nuclear abolition will be easy, but it must begin now — or else the current window of opportunity might disappear.

Finally, you may have noticed that all of the NGO representatives in this room are wearing red wristbands. (This isn't because we want to differentiate ourselves from you. I'm sure we all share the same vision.) We're wearing these to show our support for a nuclear weapons convention. The colour red symbolizes a ban — something the NPT is not. You're of course welcome to wear them, too, if you support the idea.

Written on the wristbands are the letters "NWC", which stand not only for "Nuclear Weapons Convention", but also for "Now We Can!" — the motto that we'll be using at the NPT Review Conference.

Thank you.