

NGO Statement Concerning the Hiroshima Meeting of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

6 November 2009

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), an initiative of the Australian and Japanese governments, held its fourth meeting in Hiroshima from October 17 to 20 2009. At press conferences after the meeting the Co-Chairs outlined the meeting's main outcomes. Unfortunately, their comments were a great disappointment to the representatives of civil society who have engaged with the Commission over the past year.

The Commission said that it would produce an "action-oriented report" and "lobby political leaders throughout the world to encourage real nuclear disarmament".¹ However, we fear that the Commission's report, which is expected to be released in the near future, could in fact act as a brake on the current momentum towards a world without nuclear weapons.

Various civil society organizations call for the abolition of nuclear weapons by between 2020 and 2025. Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev at successive Reykjavik summits envisioned this process taking a decade. The Global Zero campaign, to which both of the Commission co-chairs are signatories, advocates achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons by 2030. The Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) yearn to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons in their lifetimes, but the Commission proposed no target date for getting to zero. It sets a 'minimisation point' with well over 1000 nuclear weapons by 2025 as a 'medium term' goal, and no operational detail or timeframe, even indicative, beyond that. There is a serious risk that the practical result will be the erosion of a sense of urgency commensurate with the threat, and that the Commission's recommendations will be used as justification for those who aim for a world with fewer rather than no nuclear weapons. The grim reality is that a 'minimization' point with well over 1000 nuclear weapons does not minimize the dangers we face – and will continue to risk global catastrophe and the end of human civilization.

Civil society calls for the early commencement of negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), but the Commission appears to view a NWC as little more than a distant prospect. Media reports from press conferences held after the Hiroshima meeting indicate that the Co-Chairs mentioned a NWC as an issue to be addressed in the medium term (2012 – 2025), but the Commission's lack of direct and explicit engagement on a NWC in the very near future is a major disappointment. We regard the commencement of negotiations on a verifiable, phased NWC by no later than 2015, and their conclusion by no later than 2020, as appropriate and realistic.

The Commission proposed that the role of nuclear weapons be declared to be restricted to deterring nuclear attacks (core deterrence) by 2012. "Core deterrence" is not an end in itself, but restricting the role of nuclear weapons in this way is an important step to facilitate deep reductions in the number, forward deployment and alert status of nuclear weapons. However, there is a danger that the Commission's 2012 target date could actually delay nuclear weapons states and their allies from reducing the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies by next year's critical nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review

Conference. In particular, the United States' Nuclear Posture Review and Russia's review of military doctrine are being carried out now and will be finalized by early next year. Pressure is needed now. If they are to be taken seriously, the countries with over 95% of the world's nuclear weapons must reflect their stated commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons in their military doctrines. If they do, it would be a major step forward and greatly increase the likelihood of a successful outcome to the NPT Review Conference. If they do not, a tipping point towards a cascade of proliferation will likely be crossed.

A related issue is "no first use" of nuclear weapons. On 18 October in Kyoto the Japanese Foreign Minister, Katsuya Okada, repeated his oft-expressed support for nuclear no first use, indicating that he expected the ICNND's report to support such a policy. However, instead of recommending early adoption of no first use, the Commission appears to have relegated this to a medium term goal with a target date of 2025. The ICNND has introduced conditions which have caused confusion over the definition, but such a distant target sends the wrong signal at this critical time.

It is reported that the Japanese Commissioner and Advisors were largely responsible for delaying the target dates of these recommendations on the grounds that they would weaken the US extended nuclear deterrent (nuclear umbrella). This is a spurious and counterproductive argument. It is most regrettable if the Japanese Commissioner and Advisors played an obstructive role on these issues. It is governments which in the end must act to progress nuclear disarmament. Bearing in mind that the Commissioners and Advisors were appointed before the change of government in Japan and the United States, and that the Commission's independence is inherently compromised by the Japanese Co-chair being a senior serving (now opposition) politician, the Japanese and Australian Governments should take policy leadership and not allow their needed support for concrete steps to progress a world free of nuclear weapons at this vital time to be weakened or delayed. Both governments should immediately declare their support for a reduction in the role of nuclear weapons and adoption of no first use doctrine as necessary early steps towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

We are also concerned that no date was set for a ban on the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, and that a target number of 1000 nuclear weapons by 2025 reported in the media before the Hiroshima meeting was raised after the meeting to "less than 2,000". We are concerned that a process of settling on the "lowest common denominator" is compromising the Commission's work, and reducing its potential to gain wide civil society support, to inspire and to lead. We hope the Commission will yet strengthen its recommendations and provide real leadership and effective advocacy towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

In the lead up to next year's NPT Review Conference, we call on all governments by concrete action to strengthen the momentum towards a world without nuclear weapons generated by recent events, including President Obama's speech in Prague in April and the UN Security Council Resolution of September. Bolder leadership is called for in order to overcome the profound dangers now facing humanity and seize the present historic opportunity to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.


1. Summary of ICNND's first meeting held in Sydney by Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 October 2008.

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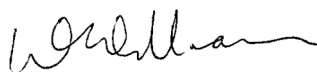
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