

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Movements > Antiwar Struggles (Movements) > Nuclear Weapon, WMD (Movements) > **Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction: struggles for disarmament, (...)**

ASIA-EUROPE PEOPLE'S FORUM

Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction: struggles for disarmament, justice for survivors, and the legacies of WMD use

Sunday 26 October 2008, by [MAGNUSSON Tomas](#) (Date first published: 15 October 2008).

The seventh Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) met in Beijing, China, on October 13-15, 2008. This contribution was given to the workshop 7 ("Legacies of weapons of mass destruction and struggles for justice and nuclear disarmament") of cluster 1 ("Peace and Security").

Dear friends

We live in dangerous and unpredictable times.

About six years ago the world's second-richest man, Warren Buffett, used the term 'weapons of mass destruction' to refer to financial derivatives - which, as you will know, have been at least partially responsible for the current economic crisis. We are already seeing the mass destruction of jobs, and of homes, and there is little doubt that more widespread damage will follow.

Around the same time as Buffett made his remark, the world's most powerful man set off on a fruitless quest to unearth real weapons of mass destruction in Iraq - and of course we all know the outcome. But real WMD - atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons - of course do still exist, and they have been used at various times in modern warfare. We shall hear more from our Japanese and Vietnamese friends about this. These weapons cause suffering to civilian populations on a scale that is hard to imagine; and in the case of nuclear weapons they threaten entire nations and even the planet as a whole.

Humanity simply cannot continue to live with such destructive technologies. They are like cancer-causing foreign bodies that must be removed before they kill us off.

But how to do it? Chemical and biological weapons are banned by international treaty, although in the case of the latter the verification system is lacking. There is work for civil society to do in all three areas, but the biggest challenge and the most important, is the elimination of nuclear weapons.

This has been the long-standing goal of a huge international civil society movement, starting in August 1945 in the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although our efforts have not been fully successful, we have had a crucial impact on the evolution of nuclear policies, including the reductions that accompanied the end of the Cold War, the renunciation of nuclear weapons by South Africa and three of the former USSR states, the end of testing and the

establishment of nuclear weapons-free zones all over the southern hemisphere.

It is therefore all the more alarming that current tensions between the big powers are threatening to revive the old Cold War nightmares. The short war in Georgia this summer, combined with the reckless US plan to station missile defences in Eastern Europe, has led to the current posturing between Russia and NATO. Recent angry moves have been made by China in retaliation for a US plan to sell \$6.5 billion of advanced weaponry to Taiwan. It cancelled a visit to Washington by a senior general, slapped an indefinite ban on port calls by US naval vessels, and cancelled low-level diplomatic exchanges with the US.

Then there are the long diplomatic wars of attrition between the US and Iran on the one hand, and the US and North Korea on the other. The news from Pyongyang is hardly reassuring: according to news reports on September 25, the IAEA says the DPRK has banned its inspectors from entering the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

The hypocrisy of the US — and other nuclear states too — in their dealings with so-called proliferators is breath-taking. It is once again a case of 'do what we say', not 'do what we do'. Their refusal to consider dismantling their own WMD arsenals puts everyone in peril since their existence encourages other states to follow their example.

Today, despite some encouraging signs such as the famous articles in the *Wall Street Journal* by Schultz, Kissinger, Perry and Nunn, and subsequent statements by British and Italian former politicians, all urging action towards complete nuclear elimination, there is a grave lack of real political will at government level. This is evident in several dimensions. Firstly the doctrines espoused: see for example, last week's statement by the US at the General Assembly arguing the need to maintain for the foreseeable future a 'critical deterrent capability'; as well as the dangerous policy of 'pre-emptive strikes'. Secondly, the lack of political will is demonstrated by technological programmes: for example, the continuing research into 'mini nukes' and 'bunker busters'. The nuclear laboratories at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore are being kept busy. It is clear too from the new nuclear weaponry in Europe, notably the British Trident system, and the French long-range M51 system (also submarine-launched), which will gradually replace the M45. The Russians too are showing no sign of getting rid of their arsenal: they still have 14,000 warheads — more even than the Americans. And they have upgraded their status within the Russian defence posture. None of this is reassuring.

To make it worse, since 1998 the world has added three regions of concern to its map of nuclear anxiety: the Middle East, South Asia and North-East Asia. The long-running political conflicts between Israel and Iran, Pakistan and India, and North Korea and Japan have been rendered more alarming by the acquisition of nuclear weapons by at least 4 of these countries. However the focus within international institutions on *non-proliferation* has led to a loss of interest in *disarmament*, which is the only comprehensive solution that can assure stability.

All these developments make it vital to intensify the mobilizations of civil society, and of course we must encourage young people to get actively involved. An important opportunity arises at the **NPT Review Conference**, to be held in New York from April 26 to 21 May, 2010. Already plans are being discussed for a major demonstration. We must bring to this event all our best energy: voices from all continents, millions of signatures, specialist lobbying, new media and plenty of people under 30!

The International Peace Bureau has a long history of work in this field. In 1987 our former President Sean MacBride launched the *Lawyers Appeal against Nuclear Weapons* which paved the way for the **World Court Project** — a worldwide civil society education and lobbying campaign to

get the UN to refer the nuclear question to the International Court of Justice. This was achieved in 1996 with the famous Advisory Opinion of the World Court. You may be aware that there is now a second effort under way to refer a new question to the Court to determine whether or not the nuclear weapons states have been negotiating 'in good faith'. If successful, this could be an important catalyst for a new move towards elimination.

One of the most important initiatives in the years that followed the Opinion was the publication, by civil society experts, of a **Model Nuclear Weapons Convention** which sets out a process for an abolition agreement between states.

Quite recently a new umbrella structure has emerged: the **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons** (ICAN), led by the IPPNW, which is focussed mainly on the objective of securing support for the draft Nuclear Weapons Convention. Allow me to *highlight some of the projects and organisations which support ICAN* in one way or another:

The **Middle Powers Initiative** (MPI) is a group of dedicated activists, including IPB, who have worked for many years now, mostly at the diplomatic level, to encourage middle size governments to put more pressure on the nuclear states. We work closely with the **New Agenda Coalition** of like-minded states.

Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) is an important network of 500 parliamentarians from more than 70 countries who put forward disarmament proposals in their own parliaments and work through the media and in other ways. It is worth noting that their leadership consists of 5 women Co-Presidents !

Mayors for Peace (MfP) was founded by the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and has now grown to the impressive total of 2,422 member cities from 131 countries and regions. They are focussing in particular on the Cities Are Not Targets campaign, and the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol.

Abolition 2000 is a general network of activists, set up in 1995 at the time of the NPT Review and Extension conference.

In addition to these international bodies, we should show special respect for the largest membership organisations, which are at the national level: **Gensuikyo (Japan)**, **Mouvement de la paix (France)**, **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (UK)**, and **Peace Action (USA)** - these are the four largest groups focussed on nuclear disarmament. But there are many others. They have done enormous work mobilising the public in their respective countries.

We should recognise too the important roles played by the organisations of professionals: the **International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War** (IPPNW); the **International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms** (IALANA); the **International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility** (INES); the **Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs**; and others: teachers, economists, psychologists etc. Each brings special expertise to bear on the problem.

Let me come back to the chemical and biological weapons. It is true that they tend to be overlooked. They are however of special relevance to IPB's current campaign entitled **Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development**, since - along with conventional weapons such as landmines and small arms - they generate very serious humanitarian and development impacts when used. For example, we should consider the heavy burden imposed on the health service by the long-term care of the victims. These are also people who have serious difficulties finding

employment, which represents a loss to society; and the trauma they suffer causes stress to the fabric of family and social life.

Just as IPB stands in solidarity with the hibakusha of Japan (and also nuclear test victims elsewhere), so we support the survivors of the agent orange chemical attacks at the time of the Vietnam war — and their descendants, since the legacy involves cancers and deformities passed from one generation to another. This is a battle fought every day by the victims and their carers; and also at the legal level by those who are struggling in several countries to obtain justice and compensation.

The most important form of solidarity is of course to ensure that such atrocities never take place again. While poisons, toxins and radiation bombs remain in the arsenals of either states or non state actors, WMD-war crimes will remain a threat.

This is a movement where everyone can play a role. We must encourage people everywhere to join in, to find their own place, and to draw in others. There is so much at stake. After all, if we in the people's movements don't do this work, who will?

In addition, four suggestions for recommendations:

1. To focus our work up to April 2010 on the NPT review conference, and to try to be there with as many as possible to voice the will of the people.
2. To support the signature campaign launched by the Japanese peace movement, and to sign it as individuals.
3. For us in Europe, to join the campaign against Nato and to be in Straasburg/Kehl on to protest at the 60th anniversary of Nato 3-5 of April 2009.
4. To study the report from the Weapon of Mass Destruction Commission (so-called "Blix Commission") where there are not less than 60 recommendations on how to get rid of WMD.

P.S.

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