

An initiative of
International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES)
International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation (INESAP)
20 January, 2009

Open Letter to the President of the United States of America Barack Obama

Dear Mr. President,

Much hope has been created in your nation and in the entire world due to your election as President of the United States of America.

We are inspired by your public statements, that you will seek a world in which there are no nuclear weapons. This fundamental change of thinking deserves our full support. We agree that the dangers of existing nuclear arsenals of the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states and the four de-facto nuclear weapon states (more than 100,000 Hiroshima bomb equivalents) as well as the dramatically increasing risks of nuclear proliferation to other states and terrorists require new political concepts and technical approaches. Nuclear weapons are inherently inhumane because they can cause the extinction of all humankind and have long-term genetic and ecological effects.

The world desperately needs a conspicuous signal of commitment and willingness by the nuclear weapon states to eliminate their arsenals as well as a convincing and irreversible plan to achieve a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World, one which can be secured and stabilized against possible new proliferators and which would be enshrined in international law.

We would like to offer our support in helping to conceptualize and elaborate the details of a plan towards this goal meeting the demands for new thinking and for realistically feasible action.

Our proposal today is to start negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention now. The pattern has to be the one which has already been set by the Biological and the Chemical Weapons Conventions – a total ban. A Nuclear Weapons Convention should not be regarded as a premature jump to a distant goal. Instead, it establishes the framework for a logical sequence of steps that ensure the safe transition to the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. The Convention should guarantee the irreversibility of disarmament and security against break-out scenarios by using stringent verification measures, preventive control measures leading to non-accessibility to proliferation-prone nuclear materials and technology.

We would like to encourage you to take the lead in this direction. We believe that the arguments for choosing this path are irrefutable.

We briefly outline a few of these:

- If a smaller number of states continue to possess nuclear weapons and have plans to use them to enforce regional security or their global interests that will certainly increase the perceived “value” of these weapons and thus dangers of proliferation. Steps aiming at only reduced arsenals will not suffice, since there is no permanent stability at low numbers. There are only two options: one is the progression down to zero; in the absence of a serious move to zero, the other option is the spread of nuclear weapons to many nations. Any argument in favour of maintaining nuclear weapons is an unwanted and dangerous support for nuclear weapon related activities in other states. Thus, maintaining the arsenals increases the danger of further spread of these weapons. North Korea and other countries should not be given an excuse by the nuclear-weapons-based rationale of those countries that still maintain nuclear arsenals and doctrines.
- Two decades after the end of the Cold War and four decades after finalization of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the time is ripe for the nuclear weapon states to fully comply with the spirit and letter of NPT Preamble and Article VI. The world has lost trust in the repeated declarations of nuclear disarmament by the nuclear weapon states. Instead, the world sees the stabilization and modernisation of nuclear arsenals without fundamental changes and, even worse, that nuclear strategies tend to reduce the threshold to nuclear weapons use.
- We recall the 13 steps noted in the Final Document of the NPT Review Conference of 2000 asking for the abolition of all nuclear arsenals to which all States parties are committed. In particular, we recall the promise of an unequivocal undertaking of the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Further, we recall the globally accepted interpretation of the NPT norms and goals as recorded in the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament objectives of the NPT Review and Extension Conference of 1995. Thus, we as world citizens are awaiting a substantial move from the side of the nuclear weapon states.
- We recall the Advisory Opinion issued on 8 July 1996 by the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons. The Court called for a legally binding instrument filling the gap in international law as promised in Article VI of the NPT by negotiating in good faith the global ban of nuclear weapons and bringing the negotiations to a conclusion by a new Treaty.
- A carefully elaborated Model Nuclear Weapons Convention has already been developed and released by NGOs in 1996 and revised in 2007; it was first submitted in 1997 to the UN Secretary-General and in a revised version in 2007. On 18 January 2008, the UN Secretary-General has circulated it as UN Document No. A/62/650 to all UN member States at the request of Costa Rica and Malaysia. On 24 October 2008, United Nations Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon gave a landmark speech, entitled “The United Nations and Security in a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World”, in which he called on governments to fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations. He gave a five-point disarmament plan calling for negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention and recommended the existing Model Convention to be used as a starting point.
- The NPT might not be the suitable framework for the entire path towards total elimination. First, the NPT has been criticized for its loopholes allowing further spread of nuclear weapons. Second, the NPT is regarded by many as discriminatory in nature and unjust in practice. Third, the disarmament objective is not elaborated in detail. Further, the NPT can hardly be universalized because the de-facto nuclear weapon states cannot be drawn in by signing the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states. Indeed, there have been encouragements to stay outside such as by the Indo-US nuclear co-operation agreement. Finally, the NPT cannot be sustained when nuclear weapon states give up their status as this is defined in Article IX (3). Thus the Nuclear

Weapons Convention would eliminate the contradictions and weaknesses of the NPT and could substantially increase effectiveness against further proliferation.

We know quite well that the Nuclear-Weapon-Free World will not come overnight. We are also aware that other fundamental questions regarding peaceful and just living together of people and nations will be on the agenda when the renouncing of nuclear weapons by their possessors will become reality. However, we are convinced that the process of negotiations has to be started right now. Only then, we can expect to bring in the harvest of this undertaking within the coming ten to twenty years.

Please, act now and take the lead in starting negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The people and nations of the world will follow suit, we are sure.

We hope that we can join you in your efforts towards this challenging goal, which is deeply rooted in our respect to humankind and our planet as well as in our own commitment to humanity.

Sincerely,



Sir Harold Kroto (Nobel Prize for Chemistry)

On behalf of my colleagues who, until January 20, 2009 have also signed this letter:

Mairead Corrigan-Maguire (Nobel Peace Prize)
Paul Crutzen (Nobel Prize for Chemistry)
Jayantha Dhanapala (former Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs at the United Nations)
Dudley Herschbach (Nobel Prize for Chemistry)
International Peace Bureau (Nobel Peace Prize)
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (Nobel Peace Prize)
Jerome Karle (Nobel Prize for Chemistry)
Wolfgang Ketterle (Nobel Prize for Physics)
Wangari Maathai (Nobel Peace Prize)
Erwin Neher (Nobel Prize for Medicine)
John Polanyi (Nobel Prize for Chemistry)
Jack Steinberger (Nobel Prize for Physics)