

# NUCLEAR AGE PEACE FOUNDATION 2006 INTERNATIONAL LAW SYMPOSIUM

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## Still Standing on the Nuclear Precipice After All These Years: Why? A Critical Look Back at the 1990s

Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director, Western States Legal Foundation \*

Last August marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the illegal and barbaric United States atomic attacks on innocent civilians. Let me repeat that: . . . *the illegal and barbaric United States atomic attacks on innocent civilians*. How different it sounds from the earnest, passive voice we've come to expect – even to utter ourselves – when describing those gruesome events, as we gather each year to “commemorate the anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” Whenever I hear that phrase, I am struck by the utter lack of accountability ascribed to the source of those anonymous weapons of mass destruction. We all learned about the Nazi holocaust in high school. Yet, even today, the U.S. atomic bombings of Japan are not widely taught in our public schools.

As the Mayor of Hiroshima told the International Court of Justice in 1995: “*History is written by the victors. Thus, the heinous massacre that was Hiroshima has been handed down to us as a perfectly justified act of war. As a result, for fifty years we have never directly confronted the full implications of this horrifying act for the future of the human race. Hence, we are still forced to live under the enormous threat of nuclear weapons.*” This symposium provides an important opportunity to review where we are now and where we've been in terms of nuclear weapons themselves and the movements that have sought to control or eliminate them.

In this era of “messaging” and reframing,” I would like to suggest some new themes.

**1) There was more than one holocaust in World War II.** In two blinks of an eye, over 200,000 human beings were sentenced to death by nuclear weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by U.S. bombers. By the end of 1945, approximately 210,000 men, women and children had perished – incinerated in an instant, or incomprehensively, slowly and painfully dying from ghastly radiation burns, unable to eat or drink, their hair falling out in clumps, their skin hanging from their bones like shreds of fabric. Delayed effects, which continue to this day, include cancer, chromosome damage, birth defects and immunological disorders. Harder to quantify is the legacy of destruction of traditional society, devastation of community life and social systems, and psychological trauma. Those who survived, live daily with the memory of “hell on earth.” *Nothing could have justified those bombings. The United States should take responsibility for its heinous crimes and apologize to the people of Japan.*

**2) Nuclear weapons are the only true “weapons of mass destruction.”** U.S. doctrine lumps nuclear, chemical and biological weapons together, labeling them all as “weapons of mass destruction.” But chemical and biological weapons, while unspeakably terrible, immoral and illegal, are subject to the whims of weather and terrain, and difficult to deliver in sufficient quantities to kill many thousands of people. Nuclear weapons, in contrast, are orders of

magnitude more destructive. According to a Princeton study, a single 150 kiloton modern nuclear warhead, ten times larger than the Hiroshima bomb and the most numerous type in the U.S. stockpile, if detonated over Mumbai, India, could kill more than 8 million people and cause untold injuries, illnesses and genetic effects. *One nuclear weapon is a holocaust. There are still nearly 30,000 of them in the world, enough to destroy human civilization in a day. Equating nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is one way the U.S. is lowering the threshold for nuclear use.*

**3) Terrorists already have nuclear weapons and are making plans to use them again.** More than fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, the United States, the *only* country that has used nuclear weapons in war, maintains a nuclear arsenal of some 10,350 warheads. It is the *only* state with nuclear weapons on foreign soil; 480 of them are deployed at eight bases in six NATO countries, ready for delivery by U.S. and NATO bombers. More than 1,500 U.S. strategic nuclear weapons remain on hair-trigger alert, ready to instantly target locations around the globe upon receiving a few short computer signals. Land based nuclear missiles are ready to launch their deadly payloads within two minutes. U.S. Trident submarines continue to patrol the seas at Cold War levels, ready to fire hundreds of the most destructive weapons ever conceived, on fifteen minutes notice. *The threatened first use of nuclear weapons, even against countries that don't have them, is official U.S. policy, at the highest level.*

**4) If you build it, they will come.** In a famous line from the movie, "Field of Dreams," the protagonist declares: "If you build it, they will come." He was talking about a baseball field and the sports fans it would attract. In the same way, as we're now seeing all too clearly, if you build a new nuclear weapons infrastructure, it will produce new nuclear weapons. *Based on close observation and analysis of developments at our local nuclear weapons labs, some of us were warning of this as early as 1993.*

**5) "National Security" is endangering our human security.** After touring the destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour said "... I can only imagine that this is what Hiroshima looked like 60 years ago." Yet, as horrific as the hurricane and flooding were, the damage and suffering they caused pale in comparison to the effects of a nuclear explosion – *a 100% preventable man made event.* As the disaster of Hurricane Katrina continues to unfold, it is clear that our national priorities have run drastically off course. Katrina is a metaphor for massive government ineptitude, neglect and racism. Katrina also illustrates that there could be no adequate response to the far larger catastrophe of a nuclear explosion in a city anywhere. *It is unconscionable that, in the name of "national security," the U.S. government is spending hundreds of billions of dollars on nuclear weapons and war while utterly failing to meet our human security needs.*

The United States is modernizing every weapon type in its still vast nuclear arsenal, in some cases giving them new or enhanced military capabilities. The recently-released FY 2007 National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) budget request confirms that "Life Extension Programs," to render the U.S. nuclear arsenal reliable for decades to come, are underway for the B61 bomb, the W76 SLBM (Sea Launched Ballistic Missile), and the W80 Cruise Missile. The budget's official policy guidance is the once-secret 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, widely dismissed by arms control analysts as a mere "wish list," when it was leaked to the New York Times. With the stated goal of establishing "a nuclear weapons infrastructure responsive to future needs," the proposed budget provides increased funding for the Reliable Replacement

Warhead (RRW) program, explicitly intended to redesign and replace the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal. Under this program, virtually every warhead component will be redesigned, most likely including the physics packages – the spherical plutonium cores, commonly referred to as “pits.” To this end, funding is provided to produce 30 – 40 new plutonium pits a year at the Los Alamos Lab. These new warheads aren’t supposed to require the old-fashioned kind of explosive testing, but just in case, funding is included to maintain the Nevada Test Site in a state of readiness. Meanwhile something like 12,000 pits from dismantled weapons languish at the Pantex Plant in Texas, available for reuse, if desired by the weaponeers. And, just for good measure, the budget provides for demonstrating the ability to produce tritium – radioactive hydrogen, the “H” in H-bomb – by 2007.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the Pentagon is poised to begin development of a new generation of long range delivery systems, capable of carrying either conventional or nuclear weapons. The Air Force has recently issued a “Prompt Global Strike Request for Information,” beginning the process of examining alternatives for new weapons capable of hitting targets anywhere on earth. Supporting materials state that the “Prompt Global Strike Analysis of Alternatives” will examine “a range of system concepts to deliver precision weapons *with global reach, in minutes to hours.*” Such systems, intended primarily to increase the already overwhelming U.S. advantage in conventional weapons, could at the same time provide the building blocks for new nuclear capabilities, particularly in combination with the warhead modifications in progress and under consideration.

This year the U.S. will spend nearly \$7 billion to maintain and modernize its nuclear warheads. Accounting for inflation, this is 1-1/2 times the average annual spending during the Cold War years. It’s difficult to calculate, but by some estimates, if you add the money going to modernize the warheads’ means of delivery – ground-based missiles, submarines, and bombers it is believed that the U.S. is spending about \$40 billion a year on its nuclear forces, more than the entire military budget of nearly every other country in the world.

Following the 9-11 attacks, the Bush Administration openly declared the potential first use of nuclear weapons – even against those countries that don’t have them. The 2001 Nuclear Posture review revealed U.S. plans for first use of nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks or threats involving biological or chemical weapons or “surprising military developments,” and targeted countries including Iraq, Iran, North Korea, China, Russia, Syria and Libya. The December 2002 “National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction” states that the U.S. “reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force – including through resort to *all of our options* – to the use of WMD against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies.” “All of our options” includes both “conventional and *nuclear* response and defense capabilities,” employed “in appropriate cases through *preemptive* measures.”

With war hanging in the balance, the President of the United States issued a warning: “America must not ignore the threats gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.” President Bush *didn’t* tell us that the mushroom cloud was more likely to emanate from the U.S. In the run up to the U.S. attack, a “Theater Nuclear Planning Document” was drawn up for Iraq.

Nuclear weapons provide the ultimate backup for U.S. conventional forces operating around the world, and they have, in fact, been more fully integrated into U.S. conventional war planning, as evidenced by Strategic Command's expanded portfolio. Nuclear weapons are *gaining* legitimacy, as the world's only remaining superpower blurs the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons and expands the role of nuclear weapons in its "national security" policy. After 60 years of non-use, it is uncertain whether these developments should be interpreted as dramatically lowering the political threshold for U.S. nuclear weapons use. What is unquestionably different now is that the U.S. is prepared to initiate aggressive wars with elevated risks of unintended consequences, including the creation of situations in which nuclear weapons might be used. But consider this: who would have believed 10 years ago that torture would be official U.S. policy and hundreds of people would be detained indefinitely, without trials, at Guantanamo? And, those with first hand memories of "hell on earth" are dying off.

As the war in Iraq rages on, with mounting casualties, a country in ruins, and the poorest in the U.S. facing drastic cuts in vital services, Washington has turned its sights on Iran, seeking again to inflame public fears of a new nuclear threat.

With the risk of use of nuclear weapons climbing towards levels not reached since the darkest days of the Cold War, where is the public outcry? What happened to the massive anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s? Why has the anti-war movement been so quiet about nuclear weapons?

When the Cold War abruptly ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, (a spectacular, though never mentioned failure of intelligence), activists, ordinary Americans, and people around the world, breathed a huge collective sigh of relief, hoping and believing that they had walked away from a nuclear holocaust, and putting nuclear weapons out of their minds. Many activists went on to other issues – U.S. military interventions in Central America, apartheid in South Africa, saving ancient forests, etc. Others went back to their day-to-day lives, raising families and working to making ends meet. Meanwhile, deeply embedded in the military-industrial-academic-corporate complex, the nuclear juggernaut rolled on, as militarists in the Pentagon and scientists at the nuclear weapons labs conjured up new justifications to project the nuclear weapons enterprise into the future. In 1992, Colin Powell, then-Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, complained, "We no longer have the luxury of having a threat to plan for." In the early 1990's, "nonproliferation" – stopping the spread of nuclear weapons – was turned on its head. The new buzzword was "counterproliferation" – including the threat of a nuclear strike to dissuade other countries from even thinking about developing nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons that could threaten the United States or its allies.

During the 1990s, nuclear weapons – especially U.S. nuclear weapons – fell off the public's radar screen. As the Dr. Strangeloves at the nuclear weapons labs got back in the saddle, questions of nuclear arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament became increasingly isolated from issues of concern to most ordinary people – including issues of war and peace – and increasingly relegated to elite policy circles inside the beltway. This trend was exacerbated when a number of national organizations that had worked on nuclear weapons issues moved their headquarters to Washington, DC, some even closing their field offices. Credentialed "experts" redefined post-Cold War nuclear priorities almost solely in terms of securing Russian "loose nukes" and keeping them out of the hands of "rogue" states and terrorists.

Meanwhile, independent grassroots groups monitoring their local nuclear weapons facilities were documenting and trying to put the brakes on U.S. plans to replace full scale underground nuclear tests with a new generation of high-tech experimental laboratory facilities and supercomputers, and proposals for new weapons production processes and capabilities. For the most part, this information was kept out of Washington, DC discourse by arms control lobbyists protecting their access to policy and decision makers. As viewed from the corridors of power, apparently, it was desirable to dismiss the fact that nuclear weapons research and development was going forward, while overlooking evolving counterproliferation policies reliant on “credible” U.S. nuclear threats. To make matters worse, as the decade wore on, funding for NGOs (non-governmental organizations) working for arms control and disarmament began to dry up, and those funders still in the field, increasingly withdrew support for independent grassroots groups advocating for the abolition of, rather than U.S. control of, nuclear weapons.

Unchallenged by the arms control community, and oblivious to calls for disarmament, the Clinton Administration squandered the historically unprecedented period of opportunity that appeared with the end of the Cold War. Clinton’s 1994 Nuclear Posture Review was a blueprint for nuclear weapons business as usual. It was the Clinton Administration that in the mid-90s brokered the Faustian Bargain to replace full scale underground nuclear testing with the “Stockpile Stewardship” program, at that critical juncture, making the decision to massively reinvest in, rather than begin to dismantle the nuclear weapons research and production infrastructure. Clinton’s 1997 Presidential Decision Directive-60 reaffirmed the threatened first use of nuclear weapons as the “cornerstone” of U.S. national security, and contemplated an expanded role for nuclear weapons to “deter” nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. And Clinton signed legislation making deployment of a national missile defense system U.S. policy. Indeed, the Clinton Administration laid the groundwork for the Bush Administration’s unilateral and aggressive foreign policy, in which the potential use of nuclear weapons is being openly considered. *“If you build it, they will come.”*

Thwarted in the national arena, U.S. disarmament groups gravitated towards international forums. They found, at the month-long 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference, that the U.S., backed by a consortium of well-funded American arms control groups, was demanding indefinite, unconditional extension of the Treaty.<sup>2</sup>

Tensions were high during the 1995 NPT Conference, as many non-nuclear states expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of progress towards disarmament by the nuclear weapon states. They stressed the mutually reinforcing nature of the disarmament and non-proliferation obligations, and warned that an international system of nuclear apartheid was not sustainable. Frustrated and dismayed that the arms controllers were avoiding the “D” word – disarmament – dozens of NGOs from around the world, adopted a comprehensive nuclear disarmament platform calling for the “definite and conditional” extension of the NPT and immediate commencement of negotiations on a verifiable treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons, with the treaty to be completed by the year 2000. By the end of the conference, hundreds of groups had signed the “Abolition 2000 Statement,” and the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons was born. Today, more than 2000 groups in over 90 countries are affiliated with Abolition 2000, and the founding statement is more relevant than ever.<sup>3</sup>

In the run up to the U.S. attack on Iraq, premised in part on the wholly unsubstantiated claim that Iraq had an active nuclear weapons program, a new anti-war movement began to

coalesce, with a heightened sensitivity to the domestic impacts of the “war on terror,” including attacks on immigrants, and drastic cuts to social services for the poorest members of our population. The first National Assembly of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), held in Chicago in June 2003, seemed like a good opportunity to reclaim nuclear disarmament as a peace and justice issue, and to reintegrate it into the broader anti-war movement. A proposal from U.S. Abolition 2000 groups to make nuclear disarmament a UFPJ priority was adopted, with little discussion or controversy. It was striking, however, that several delegates voiced objections to the effect that “nuclear disarmament is the *Bush* agenda!” This turned out to be the tip of an iceberg, exposing a vast lack of awareness in the new anti-war movement – reflecting the general lack of public awareness – about the post-Cold War realities of U.S. nuclear weapons. And it marked the beginning of a continuing internal education process in UFPJ, the largest anti-war coalition in the country, with over 1,300 member groups.<sup>4</sup>

In August 2004, on the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombings, the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, urged on by the aging “Hibakusha” – survivors – in their cities, launched the Mayors for Peace Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons, and announced a Year of Remembrance and Action for a Nuclear Weapon Free World. Revisiting the Abolition 2000 agenda, they presented their “2020 Vision,” a timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons by 2020, which they would bring as a demand to the NPT 5-year Review Conference in May 2005. By the time they got to New York, well over 500 Mayors from 32 countries – 65 of them from the U.S. – had signed onto the Mayors’ campaign statement. On May 1, the day before the 2005 NPT Review Conference began, Abolition 2000 and United for Peace and Justice joined forces to demand: “*End the War in Iraq. Abolish All Nuclear Weapons. NO NUKES! NO WARS!*” 40,000 people marched past United Nations headquarters in New York City and rallied in Central Park. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and dozens of Hibakusha carried the lead banner, flanked by city officials and NGO leaders from around the world. Behind them, spirited anti-nuclear and anti-war activists filled more than 13 city blocks.

On September 26, 2005, following a massive weekend protest in the nation’s capital, I was arrested in front of the White House, with nearly 400 others, for nonviolently “demonstrating without a permit” against the war in Iraq. As I languished in a holding cell with several Gold Star mothers, women who had lost sons and daughters in Iraq, I was again reminded of the Hibakusha and their haunting message: “*What happened to us is so terrible, it must never happen to anyone again.*”

During the Cold War years, a weapons designer at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory reportedly said, “*Remember: the Soviets are the competition. Los Alamos is the enemy.*” Today, the Los Alamos and Livermore National Laboratories are engaged in the latest variant of their ongoing arms race. The Livermore Lab was founded in 1952 to compete with Los Alamos - the permanent home of the Manhattan Project - to develop a hydrogen bomb, orders of magnitude more powerful than the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Now, while the United States accuses Iran of seeking nuclear weapons and President Bush declares that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose “a grave threat to the security of the world” - the same language he used prior to attacking Iraq -, under the ill-defined Reliable Replacement Warhead program, the Labs are working on competing designs for a new warhead, involving entirely new pits, and a new facility to manufacture them. According to news reports, the Livermore and Los Alamos Labs could have their preliminary bomb designs ready as early as September. Whichever

lab wins the competition could be eligible for upwards of \$100 million to take the bomb to development.

With no apparent sense of irony or responsibility, Ambassador Linton Brooks, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, began a recent presentation on the future of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile this way: “First, I assume that the United States will, for the foreseeable future, need to retain both nuclear forces and the capabilities to sustain and, if necessary, modernize those forces. *I do not see any chance of the political conditions for abolition arising in my lifetime, nor do I think abolition could be verified if it were negotiated.* Second, I see no conflict between our plans for our own nuclear weapons and our strong support for nonproliferation.”

Sixty years later, this is the same kind of dangerous language the great humanist social critic, Lewis Mumford, warned about in 1946: “*You cannot talk like sane men around a peace table while the atomic bomb itself is ticking beneath it. Do not treat the atomic bomb as a weapon of offense; do not treat it as an instrument of the police. Treat the bomb for what it is: the visible insanity of a civilization that has ceased to worship life and obey the laws of life.*”

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\* I would like to thank my colleague Andrew Lichterman for his exhaustive research and analysis, which I have drawn upon here. For more in-depth analysis and source documents, see [www.wslfweb.org](http://www.wslfweb.org) and [www.disarmamentactivist.org](http://www.disarmamentactivist.org). Specific references are available upon request: [wslf@earthlink.net](mailto:wslf@earthlink.net)

<sup>1</sup> Tritium production was halted in the U.S. in 1988, and plutonium pit production in 1989, due to environmental and public health hazards.

<sup>2</sup> The NPT, which entered into force in 1970, becoming part of domestic law, manifests a bargain struck between the original nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear states. The nuclear weapon states agreed to negotiate in good faith the elimination of their nuclear arsenals. In exchange, the non-nuclear states promised not to acquire nuclear weapons. As an incentive, they were promised an “inalienable right” to “peaceful” nuclear technology, “without discrimination.” By 1995, nearly every country in the world had ratified the NPT, and only the United States, Britain, Russia, France and China had nuclear weapons. (Nuclear-armed India, Pakistan and Israel remain outside the treaty.) At the 25-year mark, the treaty was subject to a review of its operation and negotiation of the terms for its extension.

<sup>3</sup> The Abolition 2000 Statement is attached. See also: [www.abolition2000.org](http://www.abolition2000.org).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org).

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## Abolition 2000 Statement

A secure and livable world for our children and grandchildren and all future generations requires that we achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and redress the environmental degradation and human suffering that is the legacy of fifty years of nuclear weapons testing and production.

Further, the inextricable link between the “peaceful” and warlike uses of nuclear technologies and the threat to future generations inherent in creation and use of long-lived radioactive materials must be recognized. We must move toward reliance on clean, safe, renewable forms of energy production that do not provide the materials for weapons of mass destruction and do not poison the environment for thousands of centuries. The true “inalienable” right is not to nuclear energy, but to life, liberty and security of person in a world free of nuclear weapons.

We recognize that a nuclear weapons free world must be achieved carefully and in a step by step manner. We are convinced of its technological feasibility. Lack of political will, especially on the part of the nuclear weapons states, is the only true barrier. As chemical and biological weapons are prohibited, so must nuclear weapons be prohibited.

We call upon all states particularly the nuclear weapons states, declared and de facto to take the following steps to achieve nuclear weapons abolition. We further urge the states parties to the NPT to demand binding commitments by the declared nuclear weapons states to implement these measures:

1. Initiate immediately and conclude\* negotiations on a nuclear weapons abolition convention that requires the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons within a timebound framework, with provisions for effective verification and enforcement.\*\*
2. Immediately make an unconditional pledge not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.
3. Rapidly complete a truly comprehensive test ban treaty with a zero threshold and with the stated purpose of precluding nuclear weapons development by all states.
4. Cease to produce and deploy new and additional nuclear weapons systems, and commence to withdraw and disable deployed nuclear weapons systems.
5. Prohibit the military and commercial production and reprocessing of all weapons-usable radioactive materials.
6. Subject all weapons-usable radioactive materials and nuclear facilities in all states to international accounting, monitoring, and safeguards, and establish a public international registry of all weapons-usable radioactive materials.
7. Prohibit nuclear weapons research, design, development, and testing through laboratory experiments including but not limited to non-nuclear hydrodynamic explosions and computer simulations, subject all nuclear weapons laboratories to international monitoring, and close all nuclear test sites.
8. Create additional nuclear weapons free zones such as those established by the treaties of Tlatelolco and Raratonga.
9. Recognize and declare the illegality of threat or use of nuclear weapons, publicly and before the World Court.

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10. Establish an international energy agency to promote and support the development of sustainable and environmentally safe energy sources.
  11. Create mechanisms to ensure the participation of citizens and NGOs in planning and monitoring the process of nuclear weapons abolition.

A world free of nuclear weapons is a shared aspiration of humanity. This goal cannot be achieved in a non-proliferation regime that authorizes the possession of nuclear weapons by a small group of states. Our common security requires the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Our objective is definite and unconditional abolition of nuclear weapons.

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\* The 1995 Abolition 2000 Statement called for the conclusion of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention “by the year 2000.” Recognizing that the nuclear weapons states would likely fail in their obligations to conclude such negotiations, this phrase was removed at the end of the year 2000 after member organizations voted and agreed upon its removal.

\*\* The convention should mandate irreversible disarmament measures, including but not limited to the following: withdraw and disable all deployed nuclear weapons systems; disable and dismantle warheads; place warheads and weapon-usable radioactive materials under international safeguards; destroy ballistic missiles and other delivery systems. The convention could also incorporate the measures listed above which should be implemented independently without delay. When fully implemented, the convention would replace the NPT.