

A World free of Nuclear Weapons: We are all responsible.

Speech by Holger K. Nielsen, Member of the Danish Parliament

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I am honoured to address this conference about nuclear disarmament. I think that Pugwash plays an extremely important role in fighting nuclear weapons and I hope that the organizing of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament will influence governments all over the world. This organizing is an important step in political globalization. Economic globalization have many positive effect – although also negative as we have experienced during the economic crisis. But it is crucial, that it also obtains a political dimension. In other words: that politicians on a global scale cooperate on issues, that in their substance are global.

There is a strong need of a global vision for a world without nuclear weapons. The nuclear issue has been put into the background in the political debate in many countries – including my own. Other issue are regarded more important. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The horrible development in Congo. Fighting terrorism. The climate change and environmental crisis. The food crisis. To mention some events, that face us every day – and which we must take account on in a serious and responsible way.

But nonetheless it is a fact, that – despite a disarmament process after the years of the cold war – there are still nuclear weapons enough to destroy the whole human civilization. During the cold war we survived on a knife-edge. Today we know that we were closer to a nuclear war than we like to think of. Fortunately it did not happen.

But also today there can be accidents and miscalculation, that can generate disaster. And the danger has increased because of a more unstable and unpredictable global order. The proliferation of nuclear weapons to failed states and non-state actors creates a new pattern of instability, that we have do deal with in a serious way.

NATO is engaged in a war in Afghanistan. Denmark is very active in this war and several Danish soldiers have been killed. It is said by our government, that this war is important because of our own security. This argument can be questioned, but anyway the government – and others - should have in mind, that the situation in the neighbouring state, Pakistan is much more dangerous for our security – and the security of the world. A fragile state, that risks to break down, combined with the possession of nuclear weapons is a cocktail, that should alarm the global society.

It gave some surprise, when the Wall Street Journal last year published an article, which pledges for a world free of nuclear weapons. The authors of the article were not less surprising. It was written by George Schulz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry and Sam Nunn – all veterans in US-foreign policy during the cold war. Their arguments were quite simple: there is no longer any need of nuclear deterrence and the proliferation of nuclear weapons to non-reliable states and terrorists makes it difficult – if not impossible - to create a regime where the disposal of nuclear weapons can be controlled.

There might be some hypocrisy in their article. So to say: nuclear weapons are regarded ok when they are disposed by the “good guys” and a huge problem if they are in the hands of the “bad guys”.

It is here important to stress, that it is meaningless to diversify between “good” and “bad” nuclear weapons. All nuclear weapons are bad in the sense that - despite good intentions - accidents and miscalculations can have disastrous consequences. But of course this risk increases when nuclear weapons are possessed by actors, with whom you cannot negotiate. Therefore we have to be serious about these new challenges and recognize the article of the four veterans of the cold war as a positive contribution to new possibilities.. Here are people who were close to the disastrous scenarios during the cold war saying: get a vision. A vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and develop a strategy of how to achieve this vision.

It is a main problem that the arms-control and anti-proliferation regime has been undermined during the last years.

It was a big mistake when the US-government terminated the ABM-treaty. It is extremely bad that the Test Ban Treaty is still not working. It is a huge problem that the NPT-treaty is in a bad condition. There are several reasons for that.

According to the NPT-treaty, countries that did not possess nuclear weapons in 1967 are obliged not to develop such weapons. But as the case in Iran and North Korea indicates there is a serious doubt about this regime.

But there was also an obligation for the – at that time – existing nuclear powers that they should remove nuclear weapons over time. This has not happened. So there is a serious responsibility – in particular for The Unites States and Russia – to get the NPT-regime on the road again.

With regard to non-proliferation – to be honest - the nuclear agreement between US and India was not helpful. India has not signed the NPT-treaty and the nuclear armament in the region is extremely dangerous. There are not guarantees, that supply of nuclear materials from the Unites States cannot be used for non-civilian purposes. Agreements like this should not be made with non-NPT-countries.

This agreement points to a basic problem about controlling that nuclear materials for civilian use are not turned into military purposes. According to the NPT-treaty it is possible to develop nuclear materials for civilian use- although the same material can be used for military purposes. This system requires a workable system of control, but as the dispute with Iran shows, this is very difficult. The answer of this is an internationalization of access to civilian nuclear technology as proposed by the IAEA General Director Mohamed El-Baradei. Our friends in Norway support an international fuel-reserve under the control of IAEA as a step in this direction. I will take this question up in the Danish Parliament.

It is extremely important that the revision of the NPT-treaty in 2010 becomes a political issue in all parliaments. The big nuclear-states have a particular responsibility to lead the NPT-regime in the right direction. But it will be irresponsible if the non-nuclear states pass over the initiative to the nuclear states. We must take an active position.

Unfortunately the Danish government is very passive to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This in sharp contrast to the Norwegian government, which has played a very active and positive role in efforts to create international solutions and an international debate on these issues.

I agree with the Norwegian foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, when he said the following in Geneva on March 4th this year: *“Perhaps new generations of political leadership gradually lost the focus on nuclear weapons and the threat of proliferation after the cold war. Perhaps issues such as the fight against poverty, climate change, global health and other key issues of globalisation have taken prominence. Perhaps we have lacked the imagination to frame the broad and shared security challenge that we all face in the presence of vast arsenals of nuclear weapons: the threat of proliferation and the risk of nuclear technology and material falling in the hands of criminals and terrorists”*.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation should be put on the European agenda. As a member of the European Union Denmark should – together with Great Britain and other countries – propose a common European Strategy on the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world. And in this context agree on common EU-positions to the revision of the NPT-treaty in 2010.

There are great expectations to the new US-administration. We hope – and believe – that after 8 years with unilateralism, disrespect of the United Nations, disastrous wars we will see a new line in American foreign policy. But despite optimism we must also be realistic. So there is still a need of a strong European voice in global politics.

A specific area for Danish foreign-policy is the security- situation in the arctic area. Because of climate-change and the melting of ice there will be a heavy increase in ship-traffic through the North-West-Passage and the North-East-Passage. Natural resources in this area will be available and create a new base for conflicts. Russia is very active in pursuing its interests. The United States have military interests through the airbase in Thule in Greenland. There will be heavy discussions on the border-lines.

Tensions always get more dangerous when the involving partners possess nuclear weapons. And the Arctic has all preconditions to become a high-tension area. Therefore the Danish government should take an initiative to a treaty, where Arctic is declared a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones is an instrument used in other parts of the world. Let me mention Latin-America as the most impressive example. But also the treaty on Antarctica from 1959 contains a paragraph on this area as nuclear-weapon-free zone. All countries around Arctic must be responsible in this regard.

In 2007 the former British foreign minister, Margaret Beckett said the following: *“What we need is both vision – a scenario for a world free of nuclear weapons – and action – progressive steps to reduce warhead numbers and to limit the role of nuclear weapons in security policy. These two strands are separate but they are mutually reinforcing. Both are necessary”*.

This vision is a responsibility not only for foreign ministers but for all of us.