## BAN THE BOMB, SAVE THE PLANET: A PERSPECTIVE FROM WITHIN A NUCLEAR-ARMED STATE

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At this Review Conference, like all those preceding, there will be two competing systems of discourse regarding the continued possession of nuclear weapons.

One viewpoint says nuclear weapons have positive security value to those who possess them, if not for the whole world. They engender stability. They keep the peace. The security they create is extended to other states, which, by means of nuclear alliances, can also live beneath this alleged aegis of safety. Within this overall perspective, arms control is deployed to articulate policies like the preferences of Goldilocks in the fable: "just-right" arsenals and deployments, "just-right" transparency, a "just-right" roster of nuclear states, and so on. This is the "stable nuclear deterrence" perspective, in its welcoming "arms control" suit.

The other perspective reminds us that nuclear weapons provide no true security even to possessors and so-called "umbrella" states, are inherently transgressive of moral and legal norms, have no credible or legitimate military uses, and if they are considered legitimate for some they will also be considered legitimate for others. It immediately follows that if nuclear weapons are not legitimate they should, by definition, be banned.

In the United States, this second discourse is very rarely heard. Adopting it in civil society would have great political power—even prior to the appearance of a treaty, signed by a greater or a lesser number of states in the beginning, that bans the possession, development, production, use, and sharing of nuclear weapons.

It should be crystal clear by now that there is absolutely no interest in negotiating nuclear disarmament on the part of the US government. The arms control community is concerned that nuclear weapon modernisation threatens "the entire disarmament regime," as one prominent article recently explained. As if there was one! Modernisation threatens the illusion of disarmament. How can a trillion-dollar commitment be explained away? Unlike an arms control discourse that glosses over the terrible reality of nuclear weapons, the so-called "humanitarian" perspective has the merits of being factually accurate, logically consistent, and harmonious with the moral pillars of human civilization and of every religion—as well as with the hard-won corpus of humanitarian law. No small differences, those.

This is not any kind of radical position. It's merely a small part of the wider politics of solidarity, stewardship, and simplicity that we need to embrace desperately, if we would prevent mass extinction, quite possibly including our own, due to climate change and resource crises. Mass species extinction is now a guaranteed outcome of the "stable" economic and political relationships that are implied in "stable" nuclear deterrence. In truth there is nothing stable about nuclear deterrence—or more broadly, about the human prospect as a whole—today. The myth of stable deterrence is a fantasy, a professional convention among nuclear apologists akin to the belief that the earth is flat because all the authorities say it is.

Instead of a doomed quest for nuclear "stability" and "security," it is a time when we need to fall head over heels in love with the planet and our human family and show it via political action.

History is advancing rapidly toward immense environmental and resource crises, which can be likened to a great wedge that we cannot control or evade. We have to pick which side we're on. The time for neutrality and temporising is over. There's the politics of aggressive war and ecological destruction on the one hand, or the politics of stewardship and solidarity on the other, with very little true middle ground.

Nuclear weapons are part and parcel of these wider political struggles, and their outcome bears in turn on nuclear policy. Nuclear weapons are not off in some neat little policy box by themselves where "experts" hold sway. They concern everyone and are everyone's responsibility. •