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**High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament**

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The first-ever UN High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament was held in the General Assembly in New York on September 26. Some 75 governments spoke, most represented at the foreign minister, prime minister, or head of state level. The large majority called for urgent action to achieve the global prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. Reflecting a strong trend since 2010, many referred to the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear explosions. Statements of governments, international organizations, and civil society are posted at: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/others/hlm-nuclear-disarmament/statements/>.

The President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, said: “*Nuclear weapons should be stigmatized, banned and eliminated before they abolish us*.” A number of governments quoted Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s pithy statement: “*There are no right hands for the wrong weapons*.”

Some governments highlighted that one cannot consistently condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria but countenance continued reliance on nuclear weapons. “*For the vast majority of UN member states, the days of chemical weapons as weapons of war are over*,” said the Irish Foreign Minister, Eamon Gilmore. “*So too, we believe, are the days of nuclear weapons*.” Viola Onwuliri, Foreign Minister of Nigeria, said that the “*zero tolerance*” for biological and chemical weapons should apply to nuclear weapons as well.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) statement was given by President Hassan Rouhani of Iran. It was a NAM-sponsored General Assembly resolution in 2012 that scheduled the high-level meeting. He said NAM will be putting forward a resolution in the General Assembly to 1) call for commencement of negotiations on a comprehensive convention prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons in the Conference on Disarmament; 2) designate September 26 as an international day to renew our resolve to eliminate nuclear weapons; and 3) convene a High-Level International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament in five years to review progress.

Beginning in June, Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy and other US groups campaigned for the US to take a more constructive approach to multilateral forums and for President Obama to speak at the High-Level Meeting (see letter at: <http://lcnp.org/files/060613_Obama.docx>). However, none of the Permanent Members of the Security Council were represented at the level of foreign minister or higher, nor was a constructive attitude displayed, especially by the P-3.

In a joint statement, delivered by a policy adviser at the UK mission in New York, the US, UK, and France said that they regret the energy being put into the High-Level Meeting, the Open-Ended Working Group, the humanitarian consequences campaign, and the push for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. A step-by-step approach, with the next step being the Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty, is what is needed, they said. A contrasting view was provided by Evan P. Garcia, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, who said that the step-by-step approach *“has become synonymous with foot dragging*”.

China reiterated its willingness to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons after the US and Russia have made substantial reductions. Russia said negotiations on further reductions are possible only taking into account factors affecting “strategic stability”, including missile defense, non-nuclear strategic arms (i.e. global precision strike), potential weapons in space, imbalances in conventional arms, and uncertainty over entry into force of CTBT.

India said it is committed to the Rajiv Gandhi vision of a non-violent world order and in the meantime is maintaining a “credible minimum deterrent.” Pakistan spoke of nuclear disarmament in the context of general and complete disarmament with undiminished security for all states and its policy of a “credible minimum deterrent” and nuclear restraint.

Joseph Gerson of American Friends Service Committee and Nosizwe Baqwa of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons made excellent civil society statements. Ray Acheson of Reaching Critical Will and I coordinated preparation of the statements and contributed to them. Gerson’s statement includes this paragraph on law:

*The consequences of nuclear explosions so chillingly described by Nosizwe Baqwa are fundamentally inhuman. They are utterly incompatible with the elementary considerations of humanity that lie at the foundation of international humanitarian law. The implication is inescapable: these weapons must be completely eliminated. As the International Court of Justice made clear, elimination is required by the universally binding legal obligation to engage in good faith negotiation for complete nuclear disarmament. That obligation is rooted not only in the NPT, but in the long history of the United Nations.*

*A full account of the meeting is at* [*www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/ga11426.doc.htm*](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/ga11426.doc.htm)