

A Nuclear Free World: What Can We Do As Christians?

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Thanks for inviting me to speak a second time and to address what many of us, including President Obama, yearn for: a “nuclear free world.”

Let me begin by sharing a little about my own history of activism to end nuclear weapons. Although I have always opposed nuclear armaments, I didn't get actively involved until I became a Quaker and moved out here to the West in 1988. The first active step I took was around 1990 when I began going to the nuclear test site in Nevada to protest nuclear weapons. Along with many other protesters, I was arrested at this site.

Later I went to the Soviet Union and took part in a demonstration sponsored by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Along with several hundred doctors and peace activists, I went to Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, and also to Semipalatinsk where the nuclear test site was located. This was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Semipalatinsk is located on the Asian steppes in a region where foreigners had not been allowed to visit for decades. This site was chosen for nuclear tests because it was so secluded. When we arrived, we were greeted by tens of thousands of Kazakhs, many on horseback, many in native costumes, carrying signs that said, “No more nukes” in Russian and English. It is a scene that is etched in my memory.

It was also an historic moment. The people of Kazakhstan joined with the international anti-nuclear movement in one of the first truly independent anti-war efforts in the former Soviet Union. Kazakhs opposed nuclear testing because they had suffered the consequences of it. They felt very strongly that they didn't want nuclear weapons on their soil.

There was very little media coverage of this extraordinary event. When I spoke to Peter Arnett of CCN about it, he told me it wasn't newsworthy.

This is a pattern we often see in the political life in America. When people gather together to take political action, even in large groups or under extraordinary circumstances, they are often dismissed by the media as unimportant or inconsequential. Only when Great Men (and it's usually men) take action do the media take notice.

Nonetheless, the efforts of grassroots movements do have an effect even on Great Men. The nuclear freeze movement is a good example. Ronald Reagan came to office in 1980 gung-ho about increasing our nuclear arsenal, tens of thousands of Americans mobilized to call for an end to the arms race.

This world-wide anti-nuke movement grew so strong it could not be ignored. In 1986 there was an historic summit meeting between U.S. president Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavík, the capital city of Iceland. Reagan proposed banning all ballistic missiles, but wanted to continue research on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) that could potentially be shared with the Soviets.

Reagan and Gorbachev almost agreed to ban all nuclear weapons, but talks collapsed at the last minute. Nonetheless, the progress achieved in this fateful meeting eventually resulted in the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union.. This treaty created a global ban on short- and long-range nuclear weapons systems, as well as an intrusive verification system.

This treaty was a significant breakthrough that led to the USSR and the United States reducing their nuclear arsenals by one half. The Soviets reduced their arsenal from 45,000 to around 15,000. The US reduced its arsenal from 30,000 to 12,000. These numbers are still way too high, but it was movement in the right direction.

Reagan and Gorbachev would not have had this breakthrough if the people in both their countries hadn't demonstrated an overwhelming desire to see an end to the Cold War and nuclear weapons.

There are two important lessons we must remember about peace: first, peace can't happen unless leaders are willing to take a risk to make it happen. Second, leaders won't take risks unless they feel they have public support.

Experts agree that the thousands of people who mobilized in the Reagan years made a difference.

With this in mind, let's look at the situation today.

Today there is no mass movement to end nuclear armaments. Fear of terrorism has replaced fear of nuclear war. I don't want to alarm anyone in this room, but the danger of nuclear weapons is still very real.

Fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia still have approximately 4,000 nuclear warheads on hair-trigger alert that could be launched within minutes. These warheads alone have the combined destructive power nearly 100,000 times that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

To eliminate the risk of accidental nuclear war breaking out, experts propose an act that would eliminate hair trigger alerts:

The Reduce the Risk of Accidental Nuclear Launch Act would call on the President to pursue a bilateral agreement with Russia to remove both nations' nuclear weapons from hair-trigger alert. It would call on military and defense experts from our two countries to outline steps that can be taken to eliminate any perceived threat that is used to provide continuing justification for the self-defeating and dangerous practice of deploying nuclear weapons on such status. And finally, it would require a Presidential report on any impediments to achieving this goal and the steps being taken to overcome these challenges.

This is one area in which we need to push President Obama.

The second involves our pocketbook. According to the LA Times, the U.S. spent at least \$52.4 billion on nuclear weapons and programs in fiscal 2008. This budget, which spans many agencies, not just the Defense Department, does not count related costs for air defense, anti-submarine warfare, classified programs or most nuclear weapons-related intelligence programs.

52 billion dollars is a lot of money, even during these times when hundreds of billions are spent to bail out banks. 52 billion would cover California's 22 billion budget deficit and still leave plenty of money to help other states to hire teachers, provide health care, and provide other needed services.

Since Russia and the US are no longer mortal enemies, why do we need a huge nuclear arsenal?

Fortunately, we have a President who is asking this question. Unlike Reagan, our current President doesn't need massive public pressure to see the value and importance of a nuclear free world. Obama already agrees with this and is taking it to the decision-making level. But unless there is some public pressure and support, it is

So where do we find support?

Let me begin by mentioning some unlikely supporters: Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry, Sam Nunn, Franklin Graham, and Rick Warren.

I never thought I'd ever say this, but I totally agree with what these men are proposing. Believe it or not, they are all calling for a nuclear free world! Kissinger, Schultz, Perry and Nunn wrote an op ed piece explaining why now is the time to abolish nuclear weapons. When hard-headed realists like these make the case for nuclear abolition, you have to take them seriously.

As I mentioned, Evangelicals are also talking in ways that we associate with liberals. Glenn Stassen and others have started the Matthew 5 Project to convince their fellow evangelicals that peacemaking should be an important part of the "good news" they are sharing along with Gospel. They have written an excellent Bible-based justification for nuclear disarmament and negotiated settlement of international dispute. I will be quoting some of these points in my talk.

But let me begin by commending what you Presbyterians are doing. According to your website, you are involved in something called Faithful Security, a network of citizens who participate in the National Religious Partnership on the Nuclear Weapons Danger. Participants are committed to organizing religious communities on a local level to break faith with nuclear weapons once and for all. Faithful Security works toward the permanent elimination of nuclear weapons by empowering religious communities to take action on a local level. The group has created a toolkit to provide resources to learn about the nuclear weapons danger and suggests action to build a safer world for all of our brothers and sisters.

You are also involved in a Muslim-Christian Initiative on the Nuclear Weapons Danger which was developed to enable Muslims and Christians in this nation to work to end the nuclear weapons danger. The initiative has developed study materials for use by individual Christians and Muslims, church groups and Islamic centers. The Muslim-Christian Study and Action Guide on the Nuclear Weapons Danger will help Muslims and Christians apply their faith to the nuclear weapons danger and provide opportunities for the two faith communities to work together on an issue of fundamental importance. *Creation, Love, and Peace: People of Faith and the Nuclear Danger* contains study guides for three sessions. Designed as a supplement to the study and action guide, the materials include prayers, readings and discussion questions.

What are the risks of nuclear weapons in today's world and what can we do as Christians to make the world safe and nuclear free? I'd like to sum up some points made by Glenn Stassen in the report of the Matthew 5 Project. Remember that what I am now telling you is not the views of a radical Quaker, but of an Evangelical Christian.

According to the Matthew 5 project, A major threat in our time is that a rogue nation or an uncontrolled nation will develop nuclear weapons, and a nuclear weapon will fall into the hands of terrorists, who will then create horrible destruction. In a July 2006 interview with Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, evangelist Franklin Graham stated, "I want to encourage the president, I want to encourage this administration, those in Congress—we need to talk to the North Koreans face to face, period. Eyeball to eyeball. And there is a lot that can be accomplished if we simply just do that." Saddleback Pastor Rick Warren said of last July's North Korean missile tests: "I am not a politician. I am a pastor. But I do know that in any conflict—whether in a marriage, in business or between nations—as long as the parties keep talking, there is hope. My plea to everyone involved in this diplomatic process is to please, keep talking."

4.2 Franklin Graham and Rick Warren are here pleading for what is faithful to the Lordship of Christ and what

is urgently needed in a world threatened by nuclear weapons. The validity of Jesus' way of talking directly to make peace was recently demonstrated by the very effort to persuade North Korea not to develop nuclear weapons that they were urging. Initially, neither the Clinton nor the Bush administration agreed to talk with North Korea. Instead they both relied on threats. North Korea responded by building what they called a nuclear deterrent against possible U.S. attack. They produced enough plutonium for perhaps ten nuclear bombs and tested one bomb in October, 2006. Wiser heads in both administrations saw that refusing to talk was not working. Former president Jimmy Carter in 1994, and U. S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill in 2007, each talked directly with North Korean negotiators. They quickly worked out solutions. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Bush have affirmed the result of the 2007 talks, North Korea's Yongbyon reactor is closed down, international inspectors are monitoring it, and removing the plutonium is in prospect. Talking works better than merely threatening while refusing to talk.

4.3 Similarly, Libya continued its pursuit of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons for several years. Only after quiet, direct engagement with U.S. and British officials for over a decade, and offers of normalized trade and diplomatic relations, an end to sanctions, and increased foreign investment, did Libya agree in December 2003 to renounce these weapons.

4.4 Ever since the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty of 1968, there have been many successes in persuading nations not to develop nuclear weapons. In those forty years, only India and Pakistan have developed nuclear weapons. North Korea, Brazil, Argentina, Libya, South Korea, and South Africa began to, but each was persuaded to reverse course. The two authoritative studies of these cases conclude that the keys to the decisions of sixteen nations that decided not to develop nuclear weapons were direct talks, international nonproliferation agreements, the international consensus against nuclear proliferation, and awareness that nuclear weapons are not very useful. In not a single case were nations motivated to avoid going nuclear because the United States or some other nation refused to talk with them. It was just the reverse; other nations did talk with them, made clear the penalties they would pay if they developed nuclear weapons, and guaranteed support for their security if they stayed with international cooperation.¹¹

4.5 What has persuaded these countries not to develop nuclear weapons? The biggest factor is confidence in support from the United States or another major nation that makes acquiring a nuclear deterrent unnecessary, combined with awareness that neighbors would react negatively if they went nuclear. "Misgivings and concerns about the long-term direction of U. S. policy on global strategy and nuclear policy are, and will continue to be, the single most decisive factor guiding the direction of would be proliferators. . . . U. S. policies regarding the development, testing, and use of its nuclear weapons. . . may well affect their perceptions of the long-term viability of the nonproliferation regime."¹² Treaties exist banning testing of nuclear weapons, banning production of chemical weapons, banning land mines, and banning production of fissionable uranium and plutonium for nuclear weapons. We urge the United States to support such treaties.

4.6 Ever since the Iranian hostage crisis during the Carter administration, the U. S. government has refused to talk with the Iranian government. But in May, 2006, President Bush and his aides wisely reached the decision to offer conditional talks to Iran. "Mr. Bush's search for a new option was driven, they say, by concern that the path he was on two months ago would inevitably force one of two potentially disastrous outcomes: an Iranian bomb, or an American attack on Iran's facilities."¹⁴ Therefore, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced on May 31, 2006 that the United States would join multilateral talks with Iran on its nuclear program "once Iran suspends disputed nuclear activities. Kazem Jalali, spokesman for the Iranian parliament's Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said the U.S. move might be viewed positively in Tehran if preconditions were dropped."

4.7 To give in to the U.S. demand that they suspend enrichment of uranium even before talks begin is very dif-

difficult in a culture that values honor. It would mean giving up the right to enrich uranium for generating electricity—a right universally recognized. Howard Baker, Secretary of State in the first Bush administration, pointed out that despite major disagreements, the United States and the Soviet Union talked directly many times, helping us avoid nuclear war and achieve a peaceful end to the Cold War. Former U. S. foreign policy officials, both Republican and Democratic, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, Madeline Albright, Richard N. Haass, and Richard L. Armitage, support direct US-Iranian unconditional negotiations. 59% of Americans support negotiations even if Iran refuses to suspend enrichment.

4.8 In the spring of 2003 Iran offered to grant formal recognition to Israel, and to cut off assistance to Palestinian armed groups and pressure them to halt terrorist attacks within Israel's 1967 borders, and a "stop of any material support to Palestinian opposition groups (Hamas, Jihad, etc.)" along with "pressure on these organizations to stop violent actions against civilians within [Israel's] borders of 1967." They offered to accept much tighter controls by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in exchange for "full access to peaceful nuclear technology," with access to any facility IAEA inspectors would request, making cheating much more difficult.¹⁸ Is this offer real, or is it propaganda? The only way to tell is to sit down and talk, and then verify the results. "Trust but verify," as President Reagan used to say.

4.9 The United States has crucial disagreements with Iran, but Jesus does not say talks should be refused until we approve of the conduct of the adversary. A New York Times editorial by Thomas Friedman asks which nation produced fifteen of the nineteen hijackers on 9/11, has helped fund both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, has most of its population hostile to the U.S., has a dictatorship without democracy, and severely restricts women's rights and religious freedoms? On the other hand, which nation actively helped the United States defeat the Taliban, has one of the most progressive and forward-looking populations, does hold a form of democratic elections, affords its women more rights and freedom than many other Islamic countries, and is asking for broad negotiations to establish friendly relations? The dictatorial nation is Saudi Arabia, an ally of the U. S. government. The democratic nation is Iran. Friedman advocates opening up talks.

4.10 Jesus is the realist. Talking with Iran, as with Libya and North Korea, may bring surprising peace. Or at least avoid horrible war perpetrated on millions of God's loving creation—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children. Similarly, we observe that on July 27, 2007, thirty-four evangelical Christian leaders in the United States wrote supporting a reinvigorated push for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to achieve a lasting peace in the region.²⁰ They urged new efforts to utilize the vast influence of America to demonstrate creative, consistent and determined U.S. leadership to create a new future for Israelis and Palestinians. (What such talks might or might not produce is beyond the scope of our call for obedience to Matthew 5:21-26. All we are pointing to is the wisdom in Jesus' command.)

4.11 In light of Jesus' teachings, we call on our nation to be willing to talk with and listen to antagonists. Talking is often helpful for avoiding war, and for curtailing nuclear weapons programs. International cooperation is also a necessary component toward making progress on other global issues that evangelicals care about. Reducing global poverty requires coordinated efforts between international agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, nongovernmental service and development agencies like World Vision, and governments, to eliminate oppressive third world debt, provide relief and development projects, and encourage economic and political reform. Similarly, advocacy for human rights, democracy, religious freedom, and creation care cannot be achieved by one nation acting alone.

I find myself in agreement with all the points made by the Matthew 5 Project. It is very encouraging for me to find Christians speaking out in this way. I have always believed as a Quaker that the ethics of Jesus, particularly the Golden Rule, can be applied to international situations. "Treat others the way you would like to be treated" doesn't always work, but neither does war. As a Quaker once pointed out, wars fail to work at least fifty percent of the time because in a war there are always winners and losers. However, in a nuclear war, there will only

be losers. So let's stop kidding ourselves that nuclear war is the answer. The answer is to take the teachings of Jesus seriously and work towards abolishing nuclear weapons and war.

I would like to end with a call to action. I am part of the Los Angeles Area Nuclear Disarmament Coalition. This is an interfaith effort which has the support of ICUJP, SCIC and other organizations.

This group is calling upon churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other houses of worship to dedicate Thursday August 6, 2009 through Sunday August 9, 2009 to a thoughtful and powerful multi-faith series of sermons, homilies and discussions on the topic "Never Again!!"

I'm pleased that this church is ahead of the curve and is having this discussion right now.

A "Never Again" event will take place on Sunday, August 9, Hiroshima Day, at a Buddhist temple in downtown LA. I have passed out flyers and you are cordially invited to take part.

If you can't make it to this event, I hope that you will sign a petition, write a letter to an elected officials, or urge your pastor to speak out about this concern. Remember pastors, like Presidents, need encouragement to do the right thing.

Thank you again for inviting me. I am now open to questions.