

# The Zero Nuclear Weapons Forum

BY METTA SPENCER

**M**ayor David Miller stood in a familiar room on the evening of November 13, 2009 – his own Toronto City Council Chamber – to host a gathering of concerned citizens. The speakers, moderators, and audience were disproportionately seasoned anti-nuclear weapons campaigners, long in the tooth but keen to revive our dormant struggle against “the bomb.”

The mayor seemed to share our proud ardor that evening, for he reminisced briefly about his mother’s somber wartime experiences and about the recent anniversary of Toronto’s peace garden, which had been inaugurated, he recalled, by Pierre Trudeau and blessed by the pope and the queen. Then he turned the meeting over to the moderator, Alexa McDonough, and sat down to hear a talk by his counterpart, Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba of Hiroshima.

That night peaceniks were occupying the polished desks of Toronto’s city councillors, which are arrayed in a semi-circle facing a screen about eight feet wide. On each desk sits a computer monitor. Suddenly Mayor Akiba’s face appeared on all those screens and he exchanged greetings with Mayor Miller, a member of the organization that Akiba heads, Mayors for Peace. Though it was Friday evening in Toronto, it was a sunny Saturday morning in Hiroshima, where Akiba was already at work.

The forum’s sponsors were four of Canada’s foremost peace organizations: Canadian Pugwash Group, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, Physicians for Global Survival (the Canadian affiliate of International Physicians for the

Prevention of Nuclear War), and Science for Peace.

There was remarkable concord among the speakers and (so far as one could tell) the audience. I had expected to hear fierce arguments suggesting that nuclear weapons are essential for the preservation of Western civilization – but there were no such disputes. I had expected to hear someone challenge the very idea of disarming when there are terrorists and “rogue states” who want, or maybe already possess, their own nukes. To my mild disappointment, no one expressed such an opinion, for there was apparent unanimity in the hall. The lectures consisted mainly of pointing out numerous complications that we must handle when ridding the planet of these hideous bombs.

I somewhat regret not hearing our opponents’ questions, which we must an-

swer in the streets, the press, and parliament. This was no debate but rather a strategizing caucus among political allies. The few controversies that did arise were differences of emphasis, rather than real disputes.

Yet there was an advantage too: a strong consensus among speakers allows a reporter to synthesize their comments and organize them by topic rather than sequentially. Hence I’ll recount here what I learned, as if it were a unified paper by a single author.



Toronto Mayor David Miller greets panelists, audience, and his Hiroshima colleague Tadatoshi Akiba, who spoke by video link.  
*Len Schlichting photo.*



Panelist and former Ambassador for Disarmament Douglas Roche, O.C.  
*Len Schlichting photo.*

## THE BOMB FROM 1945 UNTIL NOW

The celebrated *New Yorker* writer Jonathan Schell has probably written more books about our nuclear predicament than any other author. The historical narrative that I will recount here is mainly his, sometimes in his own words.

The nuclear age began on July 17, 1945 in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where the first weapon was tested. These bombs came into use without warning or discussion. In the context of the Cold War, several countries began racing to acquire nukes of their own, creating a global arsenal that at its peak amounted to 70,000 bombs.

When the quarrel about communism ended, the weapons and the nuclear use doctrine continued, albeit for no sensible reason whatever. States were addicted to them, though everyone realized how dangerous they were. Indeed, polls show that the overwhelming majority of people in the world want them to be abolished.

But disarmament is not simple. It cannot last just a day, but must be forever, and therefore must be safeguarded by treaty and by systematic verification. The process is underway. In 1970 the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force which has been signed and ratified by 190 countries – all of the UN member states except Israel, India, and Pakistan, though North Korea signed and then withdrew. The NPT has three pillars: (a) the prevention of proliferation, (b) disarmament, and (c) promises of access in non-nuclear weapon states to nuclear energy. Every five years the NPT members hold a review conference; one such review conference will take place in May, and new disarmament measures will be proposed.

One approach to disarmament consists of the creation of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZ) – regions from which nuclear weapons are excluded. At present 113 countries and regions are inside NWFZs.

Yet some states continue seeking the

weaponry. For example, India and Pakistan have both acquired nuclear arsenals and they may go to war again, as they have repeatedly in the past. If they were to use 100 or 200 nuclear weapons against cities, so much particulate matter would enter the atmosphere that a mild “nuclear winter” would occur, affecting agriculture throughout the world.



Hiroshima's Tadatashi Akiba.

Today there are only one-third as many nuclear weapons as at the maximum, yet some 20,000 such weapons still remain in the world. They cannot be used in a war because they would destroy everything. These bombs transcended warfare. Yet we did not understand their meaning at first because we didn't have the concept of environmental hazards. Only gradually has it become clear that nuclear weapons were just the first of many ways that human beings threaten the natural order on which we depend for survival. Now there are also global warming and the depletion of resources such as energy, land, freshwater, and fish. Perils exist in the land, air, and sea. We must address all of humankind's threats comprehensively.

For too long disarmament has stalled, as in Geneva where the multilateral Conference on Disarmament has been deadlocked for a decade. Now, however, humankind has reached a promising turning point. There are even right-wing disarmament advocates today, including generals and diplomats such as

Henry Kissinger. And Barack Obama is in the White House, promising to begin eliminating nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. We must join him in that effort, though it will not be easy.

Still, the other threats to humankind are harder than this one. The climate crisis will be especially difficult. In comparison, nuclear weapons are eminently solvable. And, besides us, Obama has partners now in over 3,400 cities around the world – municipalities whose mayors belong to Tadatashi Akiba's organization.

## MAYORS FOR PEACE LEAD THE WAY

“Mayors are able to make changes,” David Miller assured the Toronto audience. And Mayor Akiba is leading the way from Hiroshima, Japan, where he heads Mayors for Peace, an organization founded in 1982 by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to rally cities and citizens around the world who want a world without nuclear weapons.

These mayors reject the general assumption that security and military matters are not the business of municipalities but only of national governments. People need participatory democracy, which can take place most easily at the municipal level. Moreover, as Mayor Akiba noted, “It is at the city level that human beings experience tragedy – from Guernica to Detroit, Stalingrad, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. The great tragedies of history take the names of their cities.”

Still, after Mayors for Peace was founded, the world situation continued to deteriorate and several states were seeking nuclear capability. To respond to the crisis, the organization launched an emergency campaign to ban these weapons: the “2020 Vision Campaign.” Their goal is the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2020. The movement is catching on. For example, whereas Mayors for Peace had only 560 member cities in 2003, it now has 3,400 (including 74 in Canada) and wants to have 5,000 by May, when the group will

take the next step in its bold strategy.

At their seventh conference last year, Mayors for Peace drafted a plan and a time-table for disarmament. This document is their “Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol,” which they hope will be adopted next May at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. It calls for an immediate freeze on the production and deployment of nuclear weapons. Then it expects a real Nuclear Weapons Convention – a global treaty– to be adopted at the following NPT Review conference in 2015. For this Mayor Akiba is seeking allies in all countries. That treaty will require all nuclear weapons everywhere to be destroyed within five years – by 2020.

Mayor Akiba is so confident about this outcome that he and the mayor of Nagasaki have begun planning their victory celebration. He told us that they want to hold the Olympic Games in their two cities in 2020, to mark the beginning of a nuclear weapon free world. He’s inviting us to come to the games – but first to help promote nuclear abolition in our own cities. Ask your mayor to join!

### **SUPPORTING OBAMA’S DISARMAMENT PLANS**

While Hiroshima’s mayor was addressing us, President Obama was in his country, conferring with Prime Minister Hatoyama on how to create a nuclear free world.

Every speaker at the forum expressed great appreciation for Obama’s leadership, but none more so than Akiba, who was seated in front of a white backdrop embellished with a word he had coined: “Obamajority.” He said, “The speed at which President Obama has been implementing his announced policies is just amazing. ...At this rate, it is conceivable that all US nuclear weapons would be eliminated by 2015 and certainly by 2020. The pace of this is ahead of the timetable that Mayors for Peace outlined in its Hiroshima Nagasaki Protocol.”

Whether or not such speedy disarmament can be achieved (and none of the other speakers seemed to expect it) Obama is clearly working fast. He has already spoken to a crowd in Prague and convened an extraordinary session of the UN Security Council about the nuclear issue. The result of that meeting was UN Security Resolution 1887, which calls for a strengthening of the nonproliferation framework. It demands better safeguards in compliance, reaffirms the right of all states to the peaceful development of nuclear energy, and rededicates leaders to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

But Obama was only warming up there. The NPT Review Conference in May will be preceded by a nuclear summit that he will convene in April. The US “nuclear posture review” will be completed in December, as will a follow-on treaty to the expiring START Treaty between the US and Russia. After that, negotiations will begin for even deeper cuts below the START levels. If they are to be achieved, a strong public movement will be needed to overcome the inertia in government.

These possible reductions were the main topic of our Saturday morning speaker, Pavel Podvig, a Russian-born expert on US and Russian weaponry, who addressed us from Geneva.

### **DISARMING THE US AND RUSSIAN NUCLEAR ARSENALS**

Podvig was not as upbeat as Mayor Akiba, but he seemed cautiously optimistic about the prospect of improving relations between the United States and his native country, Russia – relations that had deteriorated badly during George W. Bush’s administration. Podvig explained that Bush had neglected the links between the countries, but the relationship is being “re-set” by Obama’s team. Much depends on the tone and frequency of contacts between the two countries. Ten years ago there were many contacts among disarmament activists, East and West, who suc-

ceeded in reducing the nuclear threat. These cooperative projects dwindled under Bush.

There are also real political disputes, of course, which may or may not be overcome. For one thing, the US favored the claims of Kosovar Albanians over the Serbs and intervened militarily there, leaving a bitterly negative impression in Russian public opinion. The worst time came during Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, a country supported by the United States.

The existing NATO doctrine is an impediment to trusting relations. Also, as Project Ploughshares’ founder, Ernie Regehr, reminded us, there is a steep imbalance in levels of conventional military forces. In 2007 the United States’ basic defence budget spent \$552 billion, or 43 percent of the world total. Russia was at \$32 billion, or 2.5 percent of the world total. At an almost 20 to 1 imbalance in conventional weapons, Russia will certainly look to nuclear weapons as a way to level the strategic playing field.

Nevertheless Podvig was confident that the START follow-on treaty will be completed. The US went into the negotiations with about 2,200 strategic weapons, compared to Russia’s approximately 2,500. Podvig expects that the START follow-on treaty will set a limit of about 1500 warheads and 700 or 800 launchers. As far as numbers are concerned, this is hardly a breakthrough, and indeed even to get to that level the countries will have to change the counting rules.

However, Podvig believes that the process is more important than the number result. The main thing is to retain the elements of transparency and verification that exist in the START treaty.

Podvig is more cautious about the next level of negotiations – which he called the “follow-on to the follow-on.” There is a Cold War, “bean-counting” mentality that’s entrenched in both countries, along with tremendous inertia. They have started programs that some people

will try to preserve. Between two adversaries, further cutbacks will be impossible. The only way forward is to move away from their adversarial relations, and the current dialogue is a good beginning. “The good news,” said Podvig, “is that the current US administration understands that negotiating dialogue between the countries has a value of its own....As long as the United States keeps up negotiations, that opens an important window into the Russian decision-making process.”

We should not expect a treaty that would commit these countries to zero nuclear weapons – but that doesn’t mean we cannot get there. Podvig claims that abolition will result from greater transparency, verification, and cooperation, allowing the desire for nuclear weapons simply to die out. That has already begun happening in the West, where numerous “cold warriors” have changed their minds.

In Russia polls already show that about half the population think that nuclear weapons are not essential. Nevertheless, there are not many grassroots groups working to abolish them. What we should do is promote joint US-Russian work on various projects – possibly even on missile defence, which in itself is not good, but which may improve confidence if tackled jointly. As Regehr added, “We have to shift from mutual deterrence to mutual reassurance.”

#### BRITAIN’S NUCLEAR POLICIES

We had two English panelists – Anthony Cary, the British high commissioner to Ottawa, and Dr. Rebecca Johnson, a spirited woman who runs a London organization called the Acronym Institute, which analyzes nuclear disarmament processes. These two speakers were on different panels, so they had no opportunity for confrontation, which would likely have happened had Rebecca Johnson been given the opportunity. She has been an activist since Greenham Common days, and has spent time in jail for her convic-

tions. Cary, on the other hand, had to correct several speakers who had called him “Sir Anthony.” One just naturally thought of him as a courtly knight, though Queen Elizabeth has not got round to conferring that honor on him.

The high commissioner’s heart seemed to be on our side, but he had to represent his government’s position – even on points with which he may not have agreed. He assured us that Britain has moved far toward disarmament. “Since the end of the cold war,” he said, “we have reduced our nuclear explosive power by about 75 percent and the number of available warheads to fewer than 160.”

The main British delivery system now is the Trident submarine, which Prime



Rebecca Johnson speaks from London.

Minister Gordon Brown has been considering decreasing from four to three. Cary then added a qualification: “provided it is consistent with credible and continuous deterrence.”

On July 18, the prime minister laid before parliament the “Road to 2010” plan, which proposes a phased reduction approach. It has five strategic objectives, the first and foremost one being universal nuclear disarmament. To this end, Britain is supporting a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Along with Norway and the verification NGO Vertic, Britain is doing scientific research into the verification of warheads. In September Britain hosted a conference of experts from the Nuclear Weapons States to discuss verification research and discuss further confidence building measures.

The second objective is preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. That will require that all fissile material be secured. Upon request, Britain will assist any nation to improve its nuclear security.

The third strategic objective in Britain’s “Road to 2010” is in promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The prime minister has announced the creation of a nuclear centre of excellence to promote cost-effective nuclear technologies. Britain strongly supports the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in overseeing nuclear power plants.

Fourth, Britain intends to stop nuclear terrorism and, to that end, has invested 270 million pounds since 2002.

Fifth, the “Road to 2010” plan proposes to gain universal signature to the NPT. Britain will work with the new Security Council Resolution 1887 to bring the non-NPT states into the mainstream. It will also press on with the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. It is not enough that Nuclear Weapons States are observing a moratorium on explosive nuclear testing; a CTBT should enter into force. If the United States ratifies it, that will provide a tremendous impetus.

Though the audience generally supported the “Road to 2010” plan as outlined, there were objections as well. The first one was against the very notion of maintaining “credible and continuous deterrence.” Walter Dorn, the chairman of Canadian Pugwash, suggested that the UK’s deterrence policy amounted to a bluff. The Nobel laureate and long-time Pugwashite John Polanyi spoke along the same lines, albeit in less provocative words.

Then the British Columbia political scientist Michael Byers argued that Britain should not acquire any Trident nuclear submarines at all and proposed the Britain should unilaterally stop building them to prepare the way for other countries. Cary replied that such a debate has been going on but he cannot

judge where it will end up. Rebecca Johnson was not present in that session but she is a leader in the campaign against Trident, and the next day she said, "Trident is not a done deal. There is hope."

Finally, we heard another objection from Gordon Edwards, a longtime campaigner against nuclear power. Nor surprisingly, he complained about the NPT's "third pillar" – the guarantee of access to peaceful nuclear facilities. The original bargain of the NPT made such a promise, but it has turned out to be a serious danger because nuclear power plants create fissile material. Edwards said, "If we want a world without nuclear weapons, we're not going to make that easier by creating stockpiles of plutonium which, thousands of years later, can readily be turned into nuclear weapons."

There was applause from the audience, but High Commissioner Cary did not go along with Edwards's idea. He said, "It's hard enough to fulfill the NPT without changing the nature of the bargain....[N]uclear energy, which had been off the agenda for a generation, has come back onto the agenda, in the carbon context. It is seen as part of the combination of energy sources..."

## THE COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY

Christopher Westdal has been Canada's ambassador for disarmament and also ambassador to Russia. He stated clearly that he is an abolitionist. Yet he took an approach that differed slightly from the growing consensus in the room, which called for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. He said he saw problems in focusing now on zero nuclear weapons. The support for abolition is not sufficient now to achieve that goal, but it is sufficient to support a comprehensive test ban, which has not yet come into force. "The CTBT is crucial," he said.

During the question period, Walter Dorn commented that the CTBT itself

provided that it had to be ratified by 44 countries, of which at least one (India) and probably three said they would never ratify it. What, he asked, can be done on the legal side to get that treaty to enter into force as international law?

Westdal replied, "I would reply: diplomatically and politically, rather than legally. It can happen in consensus by momentum." He recounted the night in the basement of the UN in 2000 when people who had announced that they would never do something, found themselves doing it.

"It was a very crowded room. There was a palpable sense that we were within reach of something that was good for everyone. When the American team led, others could not say no. There were representatives literally at the phone explaining to their capitals, 'Look, we're going to end up being the only country in this room saying no to a common good...'

"Today we already have a test ban, and the moratorium is working. As more countries ratify, more pressure will be put on the hold-outs....Testing has got to be considered a disgraceful thing to do. World public opinion counts."

## AN ARCTIC NWFZ?

Pugwash offered a workshop to discuss a project of its own: the creation of an Arctic NWFZ. The panelists were the former chair of Canadian Pugwash, Adele Buckley, and Professors Michael Wallace and Michael Byers, both of the University of British Columbia. Steven Staples of the Rideau Institute chaired that session.

The Nordic countries have been very supportive of the Arctic NWFZ idea, but not Russia or the United States. For the Russians the main problem is their nuclear submarines. Two-thirds of their fleet is inside the Arctic circle; the other third is in the Pacific.

Michael Byers suggested that "the way to get nukes out of the Arctic is to have fewer nukes." Within six months we will know more about the probabilities of

such a development, but we could take baby steps toward an Arctic NWFZ even now, such as by keeping the ports nuclear-free. "We could start with small states and gradually add more: Denmark, Canada, Iceland, and Sweden. There's no reason we have to have the whole thing at once....Put pressure on the nuclear weapon states to at least provide negative security guarantees: a promise not to attack the NWFZ states in the Arctic."

## PROLIFERATION

Ernie Regehr looked at some of the main obstacles to disarmament, including the efforts by new states and even non-state actors to acquire nuclear weapons. He said,

"We get impatient when nuclear weapons states keep changing the subject, away from disarmament and toward nonproliferation. But we still need to affirm the importance of getting the nonproliferation issue right. Few developments would be as devastating as the suspicion that the NPT regime is not up to the task of stopping proliferators. If nuclear weapons are banned, the system of monitoring and inspection will be the primary barrier to a nuclear breakout and resumed arms competition."

In the question period, Regehr encountered serious questions about the status of India and Pakistan, which have gradually been given de facto recognition as nuclear weapons states without accepting the conditions that constrain the original five nuclear weapons states. For example, they have not put a moratorium on the production of fissile material, as other nuclear weapons states have done.

It was George W. Bush who lifted these restrictions, but now Prime Minister Harper has gone to India and returned with a new cooperation agreement, which probably (Regehr predicted) lacks any additional conditionality terms. That will only make the situation worse, opening the door to other would-be proliferators.

Christopher Westdal, former Canadian ambassador to Russia and ambassador for disarmament.



The situation with Israel is different, said Regehr. It should be pursued within the framework of a Middle Eastern NWFZ.

### COMPLIANCE AND VERIFICATION

Trevor Findlay is a Carleton university professor who specializes in anticipating the challenges of verifying the compliance of all states to their arms control agreements. Of course, once we have complete nuclear disarmament, we will need exceedingly rigorous, reliable ways of detecting violations – potential “breakouts,” as they are called. But when Findlay took the floor, he brought good news. You don’t need 100 percent verification, he said. The system needs to reduce the risk of violation to a minimum. There must be confidence that you will detect all militarily significant cheating. Make cheating so difficult that it’s unachievable. They must be unsure that they can get away with it – but we can’t be certain either that we will detect the cheater. It’s designed to create confidence among allies and friends who may have a slight doubt.

We already do much verification and can easily do more. First, we must dismantle existing weapons, and make sure that there is no diversion of material such as plutonium to military purposes. We do that through the IAEA now.

But some processes are harder. For example, we must verify that no one has hidden weapons that have not been declared. For this we need intrusive on-site inspections anywhere, any time. This would require countries to give up bits of sovereignty. Finally, we must be able to detect the research and manufacture

of new weapons. Again, this requires challenge on-site inspections. Findlay says that we should inspect selectively those that are most likely to violate. But there may be objections to such discriminatory inspections, even if that is the rational approach.

We will need some sort of organization to run a nuclear weapon free world. Perhaps it will be the IAEA, perhaps a different, new organization. We’d need an executive body to handle non-compliance – something like the Security Council but without a veto. We’d need a secretariat much larger than the present IAEA, and a staff of intelligence experts.

Findlay expects that there also will be local arrangements for mutual verification between nations that have some history of mutual mistrust. For example, there might be hotlines between India and Pakistan.

Fortunately, most countries seem prepared to accept intrusive verification. Even the Bush administration and China supported such inspections, for example in the verification regime for chemical weapons.

What about non-state actors such as Al Qaeda? Findlay says that you’d work with the states where they are located. All countries are legally obliged to put measures into place. And you’d keep fissile materials from falling into the hands of these terrorists. We should ban the use of such material for any purpose, whether peaceful or as weapons.

### MOBILIZING OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The final session of the forum dealt with the challenge of arousing the political will to abolish nuclear weapons. Rebecca Johnson told us about some campaigns in which she is engaged – notably the ICAN movement under the auspices of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Johnson’s plan fits compatibly with that of Mayors for Peace: the main idea is to get the Nuclear Weapons Convention onto the agenda as a realistic concept.

ICAN plans to have a worldwide week-end of coordinated actions at the end of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Each country will organize its own unique demonstration, but the sheer number of such actions around the world will make the media pay attention.

Douglas Roche is a former disarmament ambassador and Canadian senator who is respected everywhere for his passionate abolitionism and his founding the Middle Powers Initiative. He wound up the forum by proposing a number of ideas for penetrating the indifference of government. First, he reminds us to simplify our message; don’t sound too technical. Also, he urged the four sponsoring peace organizations to undertake to get Canadians to write 5,000 short letters and mail them to Prime Minister Harper. That will be enough to gain the government’s attention. And if 5,000 doesn’t work, he says, get 10,000 letters! Petitions are not enough, nor are form letters, but individual letters that are sent by mail do count.

The forum’s sponsoring groups urge other groups to organize similar events in other regions. Canada has its own group of nuclear experts. However, this forum could not have been comprehensive without the participation of recognized international figures whose work on nuclear disarmament is well known. We found it much easier to get acceptance from these experts by inviting them to go to a streaming video conference room in their own city. In addition, this saves greenhouse gases from jet travel and preserves scarce financial resources. We recommend this format to others involved in similar endeavors.

Over three-quarters of the world’s population wants the elimination of nuclear weapons through enforceable agreements. Our task is to arouse them and mobilize them. Peace is a human right. Let’s preserve it! □

*Metta Spencer is editor of Peace and was coordinator of the Zero Nuclear Weapons Forum <[www.zeronuclearweapons.com](http://www.zeronuclearweapons.com)>.*