

Not Destiny But Resilience

Achieving a Nuclear Weapons-Free World

Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
To Canadian Pugwash Conference,
“Canada’s Contribution to Global Security,”
commemorating Canada’s 150th
and Pugwash’s 60th Anniversaries
Halifax, July 24, 2017

We are challenged to open this conference by considering “Nuclear Weapons and the Destiny of Humanity.” The title surely forces us to think anew about our work in nuclear disarmament. Since the human proclivity for the acquisition of power seems to have been ingrained in people since Adam and Eve, are we destined to have nuclear weapons forever? Or does the maturation of humanity, evident in virtually every field of human activity, lead inexorably to the universal outlawing of all weapons of mass destruction? Are we doomed or are we saved?

The difficulty in answering that question, compounded by the fractious state of international relations, makes me, for one, nervous. The constant resistance of the powerful to doing away with the “ultimate evil,” combined with the political chicanery that has held back progress on the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty for nearly five decades, does

not fill us with confidence that logic and love will in the end prevail. Yet the emergence of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a very visible flagstone on the march to the elimination of these weapons, and shows once again that ingenuity and unyielding commitment to the protection and extension of human rights can move humanity forward.

We are walking, at this moment, on a high-wire without a net below. We might make it to the other side safely without a nuclear weapon destroying large areas of civilization, and then again we might not. Those who take a mathematical risk factor approach to these matters are not optimistic.

As a Pugwashite imbued with the values of Jo Rotblat, I never want to lose my sense of hope that an enlightened humanity can fight back against the shrill voices of fear. It was, in fact, the humanitarian movement, composed of progressive governments and highly informed civil society activists, that produced the Prohibition Treaty. The Treaty prohibits the development, testing, production, manufacturing and possession of nuclear weapons. For the first time, nuclear weapons have been unconditionally stigmatized as standing outside international humanitarian law. That is an enormous achievement, and one recognized by the U.N. High Representative for Disarmament, Izumi Nakamitsu, who hailed the “historic adoption” of the Treaty as “a beacon of hope for all those who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

However, it is greatly tempered by the boycott of the negotiations by the nuclear weapons states and the arrogance of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, the three Western nuclear weapons powers, in issuing a statement saying they “do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to

[the Treaty].” At least, the great nuclear divide in the world is now exposed for all to see. World opinion is split between those who believe that the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence (“mutual assured destruction”) is necessary to preserve peace and those who hold that nuclear weapons, with their immense destructive power, are the major threat to peace. The faulty doctrine of nuclear deterrence must be replaced with a sincere desire to build a global security architecture without nuclear weapons. This is a struggle of titanic proportions. But so was the struggle to end slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

It was dismaying and not a little ironic to see the Government of Canada, the first country in the world to renounce its nuclear weapons capability, take a stand in Parliament opposing the new Treaty as “premature.” How can it be “premature” to ban nuclear weapons after seven decades of their existence? The real reason Canada has refused to participate is adherence to NATO’s policy that nuclear weapons are the “supreme guarantee” of security. NATO nuclear doctrine is a huge obstacle to achieving a nuclear weapons-free world. Canada once tried to get NATO to change its nuclear weapons policies; it should try again. It will not be easy to challenge NATO doctrine, but it must be done because it is right to do so. It is wrong for NATO to maintain nuclear weapons are essential when most of the world wants to prohibit such instruments of evil.

Another value of the new Treaty is that it will shore up the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is continually being weakened by the major powers’ refusal to abide by its obligation to negotiate elimination in “good faith.” Prohibiting nuclear weapons is an essential step toward their elimination. Thus I believe that Canadian Pugwash should call on the Government of Canada to sign and ratify the new Prohibition Treaty as a

concrete step toward the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. Pugwash must take advantage of the new political space opened up by the Treaty to revivify nuclear disarmament. Canada's respect for and signature on the new Treaty will be a measure of its commitment to a nuclear weapons-free world.

I have come to the conclusion that humanity is not destined to retain nuclear weapons, nor is it destined to have peace. The only certainty we have in this life, beyond death and taxes, is the never-ending ability of humans to lift themselves up and proceed from one era to another. Humanity has moved from the Stone Age to the agricultural era, and then to the industrial society, which is giving way to the technocratic age with all its digital wonders. The biggest transformation of all in the human journey is the movement of humanity from a culture of war to a culture of peace. We would have to be blind not to recognize that a culture of peace is gradually developing in the world, and would move at a faster pace if governments merely lived up to the tenets of the United Nations Charter.

Let us not worry too much about "destiny." Not only can human beings affect what the future will bring, we have a grave responsibility to exercise our intellect and will to ensure that the one human family shares the benefits now attainable in the world community. Vision is required to set this course. That is why we have conferences such as this.

Having dispatched "destiny," I would like to introduce another word more fitting in our search to climb out of the present dilemma of finding a way to have peace triumph over war. The word "resilience" springs to mind, for it speaks of the human capacity to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune and change. Resilience, when it is found in some individuals, is a

magnificent quality. It enables us to come up on top of adversity, to deal effectively with misfortune, to express hope that progress can be made in elevating humanity. Resilience infuses our lives with zest to tackle the obstacles in our way. It is the handmaiden to courage, a quality absolutely essential to combating the wiles of the military-industrial complex, which maintains a stranglehold over the political system.

It is precisely because we are caught up in the machinations of political events playing themselves out that we need resilience to combat the weariness and discouragements of trying to break through to a nuclear weapons-free world. Those who led the humanitarian movement that has, despite the fierce opposition of the nuclear weapons states, produced the new Prohibition Convention, have admirably displayed resilience.

Resilience nourishes us, it sustains us, it enables us to stay on the path opening up before us. Resilience beats back fear. It animates us, increases our confidence, and strengthens us to persist in developing the policies we want society to embrace. Fortified with resilience, we never waver from our core belief: the elimination of nuclear weapons is the foundation for an architecture of peace.

This central idea brought the Pugwash pioneers to Nova Scotia 60 years ago. Humble followers we may be, but we stand on giant shoulders and it is our duty, indeed I would say our privilege, to continue the noble and vital work of turning humanity away from self-destruction.

