

FOR A WORLD OF PEACE: A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

An Ecumenical Call from Hwacheon

A group of persons active in the ecumenical movement from, Canada, Fiji, Korea, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines and the USA, committed to building a world of peace, a world free of nuclear weapons, came together from 4 to 6 December 2009, in Hwacheon, Republic of Korea, seeking ways to strengthen the ecumenical movement for urgent action on nuclear disarmament (possibly in cooperation with interfaith movements).

The Conference was organized jointly by the Asia Pacific Graduate School, Seoul and the Korean YMCA with the support of the National Council of Churches in Korea, Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches. The Conference was hosted by the Hwacheon County located near the Demilitarized Zone (DM Z) in the Korean peninsula. The County had opened the Bell Park for World Peace on 26 May 2009 where in his keynote address Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union gave a call for a nuclear-weapon free world.

The Conference was held with the objectives of working towards a nuclear weapon free Korean peninsula, analyzing the state of nuclear affairs in North-East Asia and understanding the implications of these for a world without nuclear weapons. It also aimed at strengthening the ecumenical movement to face the new challenges posed by nuclear developments and to work towards a world of peace, a world free of nuclear weapons.

A New Hope for Nuclear Disarmament?

The Conference noted there could be a new hope for and possibly a new movement towards nuclear disarmament today. This has emerged prominently on the agenda of international affairs, with President Barack Obama's Prague call for a nuclear weapon free world followed by the resolution of the UN Security Council's Special Session and statements by a number of prominent persons.

However it was noted that only concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament will lend credibility to these exhortations and statements and instill confidence among the people. Otherwise it will be taken as another round in the disarmament game.

A number of important events related to nuclear weapons are slated to take place in 2010: the meeting of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, Conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Security Policy Review and the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. The decisions of these meetings will be crucial in determining whether the nations of the world are ready to take meaningful actions for nuclear disarmament.

Obstacles to Nuclear Disarmament

There are a number of major institutional and political obstacles on the road to nuclear disarmament. Without effective international disarmament machinery, the international community will not muster the confidence needed to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. Few developments would be as devastating to disarmament hopes as would a pervasive and deep-rooted suspicion that the non-proliferation regime is neither reliable nor effective.

Disarmament also requires that the secrecy and obfuscation in nuclear affairs be replaced by a culture of transparency and accountability. Openness, amongst nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states is essential ingredient for verification. And verification, both with regard to disarmament and to the non-diversion of nuclear materials and technologies from peaceful to military uses, must be consistent and strict.

The decade of inaction in the Conference on Disarmament has become a debilitating symbol of the use of institutional and procedural obstruction to frustrate people's will that disarmament becomes real.

The recent call by the UN Security Council to the nuclear weapon states which have not signed the NPT – Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea to sign it and to abide by the terms of the Treaty till they sign is a welcome one. But the fact they are asked to sign as “non-nuclear-weapon states” has brought to the fore the crisis of the or in the Treaty. The crisis is mainly because of the lack of willingness or ability of the nuclear weapon states for nuclear disarmament as stipulated in Article VI of the Treaty. The universalisation of the Treaty will be possible only by the adherence of all states to all its terms.

Steep imbalances between perceived adversaries in conventional military strength will also continue to frustrate nuclear disarmament– for e.g. the disparities between Russia and individual members of the NATO and those between India and Pakistan

The Korean Peninsula

The Korean Peninsula continues to be a nuclear flashpoint. While the focus is on North Korea's recently started nuclear programme, the long history of nuclearisation of the region with the dominant role of the USA is often conveniently forgotten. The presence of US nuclear weapons in the peninsula from early 1950s and the nuclear support by Soviet Union for North Korea had become an integral part of the military nuclear order in North East Asia. The efforts of North Korea to acquire nuclear weapons have to be seen against the background of the continuous threat the US posed to that state and international community, particularly the US refusal to respond adequately to North Korea's energy crisis and its aspiration for integration into the global market. Diplomatic initiatives to deal with the situation are welcome.

The larger issue of nuclear proliferation of the region with Japan possessing the technology and materials to produce nuclear weapons and possible nuclear ambitions of South Korea will have to be seriously addressed in dealing with nuclear disarmament in North East Asia.

The Pacific

The Pacific, one of the most beautiful parts of the world has been disfigured and mutilated by imperial nations testing their weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons states like the USA, United Kingdom and France have conducted atmospheric and underground tests in the region. Among these the French have the dubious distinction of carrying out the largest number of tests for the longest period. This is not to underestimate the damage done by the others. In spite of world wide protests especially in the seventies and eighties, the French continued nuclear tests in the Pacific till 1995. The region is still struggling for justice and compensation for nuclear veterans and all victims of nuclear tests carried out in the Pacific.

South Asia

The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 have created one of the most dangerous nuclear zones in the world. At a distance of seconds by missiles, the two countries which have a history of several wars in six decades, is now engaged in a nuclear and missile race. Both have nuclear doctrines parts of which are aggressive. Both remain outside the NPT. But both have become de-facto nuclear weapon states with the

more than tacit approval of the United States. China has been a nuclear power for long. The triangular relations and tensions among the three neighbouring nuclear states make the situation particularly grave and disturbing.

The Middle East

Discussions and international reactions on the nuclear issue in the Middle East are largely if not solely focused on Iran. This is in spite of the fact that Israel has been a nuclear weapon state for long, though this has been publicly acknowledged only recently by the United States. While those who advocate nuclear disarmament will have to oppose any new state acquiring nuclear weapons, unless the international community faces the issue of Israel's nuclear arms, the nuclear proliferation in the region cannot be prevented. The impression has fast gained ground that America's "friends" can have nuclear weapons but its "enemies" cannot. This is what is done in the name of non-proliferation.

U.S. Nuclear Doctrines

The redefinition of war by the United States officially changing war aims from defeating an adversary to 'regime change' and 'occupation' and its claim of a right of preemption which means preventative wars have implications not only for conventional weapons but also for nuclear weapons.

There is a close link between the current nuclear doctrine of the USA and the new stage of proliferation. The nuclear doctrine of the USA places new emphasis on the utility of nuclear weapons in U.S. military strategy. It considers new uses of nuclear weapons and claims that nuclear weapons may be used in any war including preventative wars. When the mightiest military machine claims that nuclear weapons are indispensable, the message it sends to nations is loud and dangerous.

The national missile defense program of the USA marks a new and even more disastrous stage in nuclear arms race and the weaponization of space with the US laying claim, in effect, to monopoly control over space.

The Techno-nuclear Complex

The global nuclear regime is closely integrated into the technological and scientific regime in terms of research and development (R&D) for the weapons industry and in terms of advanced technology in the military strategy and tactics including cyber warfare. This technocracy is the inner engine of industrial, communications and governmental systems which are integrated with the global military regime. The nuclear regime is an integral part of this technocratic regime.

The highly technocratic setup that is characteristic of the management of nuclear technology and nuclear weapons has been linked with the elements of secrecy, non-transparency, and concentrated highly undemocratic decision-making power. Nuclear technology therefore strengthens and reinforces the worst tendencies in our societies which are geared toward more elite, hierarchical rule and militate against meaningful, participatory democracy.

Patriarchy and Nuclearism

The links between patriarchy and nuclearism – the latter as the epitome of military might – need to be emphasized. It is important to highlight that nuclearism is the most extreme and obscene form of a culture of militarism and such a culture has been undergirded by an ideology of power and hyper-masculinity. The worst manifestations of patriarchal and sexist behaviour are reinforced through the ideology of militarism and nuclearism.

The Great Human Cost

People of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even after sixty five years, are suffering from the after-effects of the first ever use of nuclear bombs. This continuing tragedy should have been an eye opener for the world as the people there cried “Never Again”. But their agony, tears and cries have been ignored by nations which went on making and acquiring more and more destructive nuclear weapons.

Perhaps less known is the high human cost paid by people living in areas where nuclear tests were conducted. People were uprooted and relocated from their lands of birth and also were not given the full information of the nature of nuclear activity and its effects and were told blatant lies that their contribution would contribute positively towards humanity. The immediate effects of acute exposure in radiation led to excessive burns and increase of carcinogenic diseases. Widespread pollution and devastation on land and marine sources had forced people to move afar and reduced any chances of returning to their homelands. The governments have refused to take responsibility for their part in contributing towards health problems, displacement, pollution and “invisible contamination” passed on to future generations.

The Ecological Impact

This raises the larger issues of the ecological impact of nuclear weapons. Their use generates environmental side effects that are now judged to be far more devastating than even the disastrous consequences of the initial blast. A recent study of the impact of a regional nuclear war between India and Pakistan predicts some 20 million people dead by the bombings, followed by ten years of shortened growing season because of soot blown into the upper atmosphere. The latter would throw the populations of the region into deeper poverty and hunger. Because the climatic changes would affect every region, these would put at risk the lives of the 800 million most food-insecure people in the world.

The economics of nuclear arms

The economics of nuclear armaments is an untold story of financial profligacy. The enormous allocation of resources to the world’s deadliest weapon system is unconscionable at any time and a heavy burden on coming generations. In a world of endemic hunger, disease and poverty, in a world of over-consumption, pollution and climate change, the cost of nuclear weaponry has devastating consequences in terms of true security which, at a minimum, is social, economic and political in nature.

The Ecumenical Response

From its inaugural assembly in 1948 till the most recent one in 2006, the WCC has called for the abolition of nuclear weapons as weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction endangering humanity and the whole creation. It has maintained a consistent stand with regard to the elimination of nuclear weapons within the framework of a broader commitment to living “without resort to arms” and to seeking peace with justice and with respect for the integrity of creation. The issues have been addressed by the governing bodies of the WCC and a large number of member churches from a moral, faith-based and international perspective. At times their recommendations have been prophetic for actions by governments and concerned people.

In 1954, the churches identified in viable political terms the main elements of what more than fourteen years later became the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. In 1961, from New Delhi the WCC Assembly called for two concrete steps that still define disarmament progress - no-first-use of nuclear weapons and nuclear-weapon-free zones to enhance the security of citizens in countries without the bomb. In 1983, the Vancouver Assembly called upon churches, especially those in a Europe divided between East and West, to redouble their efforts to convince their governments to negotiate for security instead of seeking it through

weapons of mass destruction. The Porto Allegro Assembly in its statement “On the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons” affirmed that all people of faith are needed in our day to expose the fallacies of nuclear doctrine.”

The WCC Assembly in 1983 in Vancouver in its statement on Peace and Justice, endorsing the conviction of the Panel on the Public Hearing on Nuclear Disarmament (1981) declared: “The nuclear issue is in its impact and thrust to humanity question of Christian discipline and faithfulness to the Gospel.” The ecumenical process Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation took up the nuclear issue as a matter of faith. These theological affirmations have to be reinforced by formulating clear positions on developments in the buildup of nuclear weapons and armaments including extended deterrence, new weapon systems, missile defence and war fighting postures of new nuclear doctrines including preemption.

The concept of shared human security is a reference point for ecumenical policies and programmes that address the critical transnational issues already defining the 21st century. These include climate change, the twin crises of chronic impoverishment and endemic over-consumption and the nuclear threat. Our well-being and our security are *shared* because of the evermore transnational nature of our existence, our shared responsibility for each other’s well-being, and the much wider participation necessary to build genuine security today.

The Hwacheon Call

The Hwacheon Call is addressed to the ecumenical community, its worldwide and regional organizations, member churches and all those willing to cooperate in the active pursuit of a world of peace – a world free of nuclear weapons.

- i. The time has come for the churches to seek greater and stronger unity to address together the issues of nuclear weapons. This demands robust development of clear policy goals, close attention to the wisdom and values reflected in sixty years of ecumenical engagement for a world without nuclear weapons, plus disciplined pursuit by member churches, specialized ministries, church-related NGOs and Christians active in wider peace movements of the actions and recommendations that the ecumenical community has made over the years.
- ii. The WCC has an impressive history of dealing with the issue of nuclear disarmament. Today because of the urgency of the situation it should give the highest priority to nuclear disarmament and carry out its God-given and historic responsibility in clearly envisioning a nuclear-weapon-free world and actively working for it. This should form an important agenda of the WCC International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011.
- iii. While the theological positions of the WCC on nuclear issues have been clear, it is necessary to reformulate those positions taking into account new developments and new nuclear doctrines including preemption. Such reformulation is necessary to form the basis for a new commitment by churches and Christians towards nuclear disarmament especially in view of the increasing propensity to the use of force to settle disputes between nations.
- iv. The dangers posed by the nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula with the background of division and continuing tension should alert the ecumenical community for focused attention on the situation and for sustained support to the Korean churches and people in their continuing struggle for peace and reunification.

- v. The WCC and the churches in collaboration with all concerned people should closely monitor the forthcoming events and conferences related to and dealing with nuclear disarmament critically analyzing their agenda, processes and decisions.
- vi. It is important to mobilize and consolidate latent majorities in all the churches opposed to nuclear weapons as part of the strategy. There should be coordination between international action and national level actions by the churches so that governments and inter-governmental bodies hear the same message from the member churches and their ecumenical organizations.
- vii. There is need for universalising the nuclear proliferation regime with states that possess nuclear weapons which are not signatories of the NPT – Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea – being brought into it. The credibility of NPT to a large extent depends on the willingness of the nuclear weapon states to fulfil their treaty obligations under Article VI. Greater pressure must be put on these governments.
- viii. In view of the increasing nuclear proliferation and nuclear tensions in the Asian region, the CCA should give high priority to the issue. In Asia the nuclear threat has never been as high as it is today stretching from West Asia through South Asia to North-East Asia. Nuclear disarmament should be treated by the CCA and member churches as a major faith concern and a test of discipleship.

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