

CND Annual General Meeting
Joseph Gerson
London, October 9, 2020

I want to thank Kate Hudson and CND for the opportunity to join you today. This is an exciting moment in British and world history. Even the *New York Times* editorialized last Sunday that Britain's choice is between "nuclear weapons and troops". Britain's terrible economic crisis and the years of CND's dedicated campaigning have brought us within sight of the defeat of the Trident replacement, and ultimately a nuclear weapons free Britain.

In some of our conversations, I've heard an edge of despair about the Cameron government's commitment to maintaining Trident. Let's take a deeper look at the context: Even as your aristocracy struggles to hold on, at all costs, to the remnants of its imperial wealth and power, your nation – in a more advanced stage than mine – has long passed the zenith of empire. For both of our societies, the choice ahead is whether they will become impoverished Sparta's or democratic societies in which all are accorded the dignity and respect we are due. How that choice is answered depends on how we and broader peoples' movements respond.

NPT Review & International Cooperation

This past year provided the opportunity to work closely together as we organized to impact the NPT Review Conference. With nudging from Bruce Kent, I found myself with the responsibility to help unify the U.S. movement to facilitate our international partner's campaigning. We built the NPT Review International Planning Committee with representatives from 25 leading abolitionist movements, and our call, drafted by Kate

Hudson, was endorsed by more than 300 organizations. With Dave Webb's and others help, we organized the most effective international peace conference held on the eve of the NPT Review in many years. 1,000 leading organizers and activists from 30 countries learned and planned with Global Hibakusha, with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and worked together in 26 workshops. The IPC also arranged the presentation of 17 million abolition petition signatures to NPT Review Conference.

With Non-Aligned and other non-nuclear nations, we won limited victories: notably the final Review Conference statement which reaffirmed the imperative of achieving "a world without nuclear weapons" and which mandated an international conference to lay the foundations for a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. That said, our most important accomplishment may have been the foundations we built for the next stages of our struggle: developing deeper working relations among the world's abolition movements.

But there are also profoundly disturbing truths to be faced. In the last days of the Review Conference, the nuclear powers blocked a final statement that would have set deadlines for negotiating a nuclear weapons abolition convention. And, we were unable to block plans by all of the nuclear powers to "modernize" their nuclear arsenals.

After the Review Conference, I felt heart sick as I reread the Obama Administration's Nuclear Posture Review, with its reiteration of U.S. first strike policies and its call to modernize the U.S. nuclear arsenal to ensure U.S. dominance for the next 30 years. This should not be surprising, given CIA Director (and former Clinton Chief of

Staff) Leon Panetta's observation quoted in Bob Woodward's new book that "no Democratic president can go against military advice, especially if he has asked for it."

Not to be left behind, President Putin responded to the U.S. build up by authorizing funding to modernize Russia's nuclear weapons infrastructure for the next 50 years. And, the reality is that all the nuclear powers are modernizing their genocidal and omnicidal arsenals.

Could these weapons ever be used? The sorry history of the past six and a half decades unequivocally answers "yes!" We haven't come that far from the Assyrian war scenes depicted on the looted murals over at the British Museum. During wars and international crises, the leaders of every nuclear weapons state has prepared and threatened to initiate nuclear war. As we meet, "all options are on the table" in the confrontation with Iran. The U.S. has made such preparations and threats more than thirty times. Maggie Thatcher reportedly threatened nuclear attack during the Falklands War. Sarkozy made his threat against Iran, and the list goes on...

Last May, the NATO "experts group", issued its report urging that NATO remain a nuclear alliance. Supported by NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen, Hillary Clinton had already done her best to resist pressure from "Old Europe" to rethink continued deployment of Washington's so-called tactical nuclear weapons on the continent.

Some celebrated last month's call by three dozen former European officials urging NATO to revise its nuclear strategy. Clearly there are differences within the alliance that we should be exploiting. But, if you actually read what they wrote, you will

find that their call reaffirms so-called "deterrence". It concedes the need for the continued presence and reliance upon U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. It leaves open the possibility of U.S./NATO nuclear attacks against Iran and Russia. And, since none of the "legal" nuclear powers are in full compliance with the NPT, it would leave the "game" of nuclear threats and extortion pretty much unchanged.

The call also reaffirms NATO alliance cohesion as a central value, which is deeply troubling given NATO's commitment to "out of area" operations. As with Afghanistan, NATO is designed for global "reach", including containing China.

Our movements must give priority to challenging the nuclearism in our respective countries. So let me say a few words about the U.S. movement.

Since Obama's Prague speech, we've had the "New START" treaty, the first-strike Nuclear Posture Review, and the "Nuclear Security Summit" which focused on non-proliferation not abolition. And, Secretary of State Clinton was clear that "our goal [is] of a world someday, in some century, free of nuclear weapons."¹ So much for the commitment to abolition!

Many of us in the U.S. movement are working for ratification of the modest New START treaty next month. If we fail, don't expect meaningful arms reductions or progress toward abolition in the U.S. any time soon. The treaty's value lies not in the limited number of warheads to be eliminated, but in stabilizing U.S.-Russian relations and thus preventing a renewed Cold War era-style arms race.

¹ Hillary Clinton. U.S. State Department Web page: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/144577.htm>

But we are not uncritical. When fully implemented, the two superpowers will still retain more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Not counting stockpiled weapons, these arsenals will have the destructive capacity of about 60,000 Hiroshimas.

And, as you probably know, President Obama's budget calls for massive funding increases to expand and modernize the country's nuclear weapons infrastructure and arsenal. There's even money to study development of the new nuclear weapon that the Nuclear Posture Review says we won't be building and to develop a new nuclear-capable cruise missile.

So, where does this leave us?

Our national movements are the foundation of our international movement. Each of us has the historic and moral responsibility to do the popular education and mobilization needed to end our governments' reliance on what President Clinton called "the cornerstone of our policies": preparations and threats to inflict nuclear genocide and omnicide. Think about it. Genocide and omnicide are the cornerstones of state policies and power. That is the world we inherited and live in.

In Britain this means prevailing in the No-Trident Replacement campaign, which will lessen the danger of nuclear war and inspire a new wave of international action for abolition. It will also undermine the rationales our nuclear elites use to legitimize their preparations for nuclear Armageddon.

In the U.S., in addition to working for "New START" ratification and hoping that we can move onto the CTBT next year, we are intensifying efforts to integrate demands

for nuclear disarmament with popular demands for cutting the Pentagon's gargantuan budget to fund job creation and meet other human needs.

On an international level, member groups of our International Planning Committee will meet Sunday night to explore how best to reinforce one another's campaigns and to build on pressure for a nuclear weapons abolition convention. NATO and the Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone will also be on our agenda.

And next month, some of us will be privileged to participate in the Nobel Peace Prize laureates World Summit in Hiroshima, where we will press for the abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020, as urged by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki mayors and Mayors for Peace. And we will link our demands for slashing nuclear and military budgets to those of other popular movements rightly demanding that our governments create jobs and fund people's urgent economic needs.

Let me conclude with a truism. What we do here is important, but more important is what we do when we return to our communities. I thank you again for the privilege of joining you, and I look forward to learning from you and to seeing what we can achieve together.