

JULY 5, 2017



REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO NEGOTIATE A LEGALLY-BINDING
INSTRUMENT TO PROHIBIT NUCLEAR WEAPONS, LEADING TOWARDS
THEIR TOTAL ELIMINATION

EVIDENCE OF THE HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF
NUCLEAR WEAPONS: "THE ROAD BACK TO THE
NUCLEAR BRINK" 21 JUNE, 2017

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The Road Back to the Nuclear Brink: UN Side Session 21 June, 2017

Speakers:

Dr Hans Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists www.fas.org

Dr Matthew McKinzie, Natural Resources Defense Council www.nrdc.org

Dr Arjun Makhijani, Institute for Energy and Environmental Research www.ieer.org

Dr Tilman Ruff, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War www.ippnw.org

Slides were presented by Dr's Kristensen and McKinzie, and these are available on the web:

https://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Brief2017_UN_FAS_NRDC_Final.pdf

The sessions were not documented fully. The following are excerpts from comments made by the speakers, and do not fully summarize the presentations.

“We had huge reductions in nuclear weapons after the Cold War, but now the pace of reduction has slowed, as if we’ve already cleaned out the weapons we wanted to get rid of, and we now estimate our total global inventory of nuclear weapons to be just below 15,000, including many thousands of retired warheads awaiting dismantlement,” said [Hans M. Kristensen](#), Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists and co-author of the World Nuclear Forces overview in the SIPRI Yearbook. “Nuclear weapons in the military arsenals now number about 9500, of which about 1800 are on alert and ready to fly on short notice.”

“All these numbers have declined compared to the Cold War, and the nuclear weapons states emphasize that when they want to show the progress they’re making,” said Kristensen. “Yet nuclear dangers are growing. There’s now a clear trend towards increasing the role of nuclear weapons in limited regional scenarios and improving the effectiveness of nuclear weapons by increasing the accuracy to use lower-yield weapons for targets that used to require higher yield. That tends to make them more credible in the eyes of warfighters and more usable in the eyes of others. We must now change that and reduce nuclear weapons’ role. The ban treaty is an expression of frustration about the lack of progress under the existing treaty regime in doing that.”

“Both US and Russia are modernizing their nuclear arsenals,” said [Dr. Matthew McKinzie](#), Natural Resources Defense Council Senior Scientist and Director of NRDC's nuclear program. He and Hans Kristensen are co-authors of a [study](#) revealing recent upgrades in targeting capability of US nuclear weapons that have made them significantly more destructive. “That reveals an expectation that instead of reducing and eliminating nuclear arsenals, we will have these weapons for generations to come. That’s not the future we want.”

“Hans and I count about 1800 nuclear weapons currently on high alert, capable of being launched within ten minutes,” said McKinzie. “Our survival now literally depends on proper day-to-day function of nuclear weapons command and control personnel, computers and systems. What happens if they ever falter? Beyond the power of these weapons, we need to understand the vulnerability they create, including for the states that possess them.”

[Dr. Arjun Makhijani](#), president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, framed the current situation in historical context, “Briefing President Truman in April 1945, Henry Stimson [wrote](#), ‘if the problem of the proper use of this weapon can be solved, we would have the opportunity to bring the world into a pattern in which the peace of the world and our civilization can be saved,’ this illustrates how nuclear weapons were conceived as weapons of coercion, unilaterally forcing the rest of the world into a ‘pattern.’ The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was an instrument against unilateral, first-strike thinking, but it was renounced by the US in 2002. Much of today’s nuclear tensions originate from that. Today we have a [much more complex context](#) than a nuclear monopoly or duopoly.”

“The nuclear ban treaty takes the right view,” said Makhijani. “It is a statement that nuclear weapons are not in [not in compliance with humanitarian norms](#) and law; they are out of bounds. Safety cannot be, as Churchill once said of nuclear weapons, ‘the sturdy child of terror’ and survival cannot be ‘the twin brother of annihilation.’”

“All of the evidence points to the consequences of nuclear weapons production, testing and use being worse than we originally thought,” said [Dr. Tilman Ruff, MD](#), Co-President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. “There has been willful denial of the severity, duration and indiscriminate nature of nuclear weapons’ effects. The evidence was often not collected, and where it was collected it was often suppressed and ignored. Yet the relentless trend is that the more we know about the health impacts of exposure to ionizing radiation, the extent of confluent fires that would burn in cities targeted by nuclear weapons, and the vulnerability of the global climate on which we all depend, the more we know the worse it looks. The reductions we’ve seen in the global nuclear arsenal to date, while welcome, have not materially reduced the existential threat they pose. There is groundbreaking scientific analysis showing that using less than half a percent of today’s nuclear arsenals (less than a tenth of a percent of their total yield) on cities would [cool, darken and dry](#) the surface of the whole planet, decimating agriculture and putting billions in jeopardy from [starvation](#). Britain, France, China, Israel, India and Pakistan have smaller arsenals, but even these pose a global threat.”

“An unprecedented [collaboration](#) of the world’s largest federations of health professionals has come together around the urgent planetary health imperative to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. This has brought together the World Medical Association, The International Council of Nurses, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

“It’s not enough to present this evidence. We have a responsibility to make sure the evidence is understood, its implications seen and **acted upon**. The ban treaty does this. Food security, intergenerational health impacts, disproportionate impacts on women and girls are all included. It brings the interests of global humanity and democracy towards eliminating nuclear weapons. The treaty needs to make plain that the possession of nuclear weapons by any state pose an existential threat to all humanity. The health professional federations’ joint conclusion is that “A treaty banning nuclear weapons will fill that [legal] gap for the worst weapons of all, and is the best and most feasible step that can now be taken toward their elimination.”

“I have no doubt it will have a substantial impact, including on the nuclear weapons states, despite the fact they are not here negotiating it.”

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Respectfully submitted,

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