

Hiroshima Day Speech, 2011

2011-08-06 by Metta Spencer

Psychologists tell us that happiness comes from giving yourself over to a cause greater than yourself. Well, do I have a humdinger of a cause for you! Thirty years ago millions of people were engaged in it: to abolish nuclear weapons. In Toronto the movement was centered in this church. Upstairs in the chapel we founded the Canadian Disarmament Information Service. A hundred persons a day came through, picking up flyers and holding press conferences. We were all busy; sometimes I slept on the floor upstairs. I recommend such activism to everyone. I promise it will make you happy.

Previous activists had already achieved the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970, and several Nuclear Weapons Free Zones—regions where countries pledge not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons. NWFZs were created Latin America in 1968, the South Pacific in 1986, Southeast Asia in 1995, Central Asia in 2006 and Africa in 2009. Nuclear-weapon states pledge not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the parties to NWFZs. In 2009 when the African NWFZ came into force, NWFZs covered 56% of the Earth's land area; however only 39% of the world's population lives in NWFZs. So we still have work to do.

The 1980s brought some big breakthroughs, thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev, who listened closely to Western peace researchers in Pugwash, IPPNW, and the Federation of American Scientists. But in the West, grassroots activists had more impact.

When Reagan and Gorbachev met in Iceland in 1986 they came within a hairsbreadth of agreeing to abolish all nuclear weapons—but unfortunately, Reagan couldn't bear to give up his Star Wars project. Later, they did reach sign the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty—the INF—which eliminated ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 300-3,400 miles. That soothed lots of nerves in Europe—maybe prematurely.

More treaties followed. The START treaty of 1994, barred both the US and Russia from deploying more than 6,000 nuclear warheads. About 80 percent of all strategic nuclear weapons then in existence were removed.

Then in 2003 came the Moscow Treaty or so-called SORT Treaty, which limited both sides to between 1700 and 2200 deployed warheads apiece. But after that, a decade passed with no further progress. People had stopped pushing, not realizing that the dangers still exist. There were 65,000 nuclear warheads on the planet in 1985 and still about 22,000 in 2010.

At least 2600 strategic nuclear warheads are on high alert. They could be launched and explode on their targets in less than one hour, even in response to a false alarm, which is not an uncommon event. At least 20 mishaps have occurred that might have started an accidental nuclear war.

- There are other dangers too. Nuclear power plants produce plutonium, which could be stolen and made into nuclear weapons. Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea have nuclear weapons. Iran and Burma may be trying to get them, as are some non-state actors. The prospects for disarmament

depends on the recognized nuclear weapons states, keeping their pledge disarm. And we need a more powerful regulatory body that's able to monitor and enforce compliance.

- Finally, there's the danger of nuclear darkness. The highest danger of war today involves India and Pakistan. If 100 bombs of Hiroshima size were detonated in a small war between just those two states, the smoke would block about 10 percent of the sunlight and shorten the growing season, causing starvation for much of the world and destroying 45% of our ozone layer. A large nuclear war would make the Earth uninhabitable. We have work to do.

- There are some new grounds for hope. Obama and Medvedev reached the New START Treaty. Unfortunately, because the military-industrial complex is so powerful, the Senate allocated a huge amount to upgrade existing nuclear weapons facilities. However (goody-goody!) the current pressure to reduce the US budget may have one beneficial side effect—cutting those very expenditures.

Here are some assignments for you to work on:

- CTBT. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) bans all nuclear explosions in all environments, for military or civilian purposes. It has not entered into force, largely because the United States has not ratified it. Obama will bring it up for ratification, and we should send good vibes his way for that.

- Arctic NWFZ. The Canadian Pugwash Group is working to create a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Arctic. They have a website, which explains the project. Go visit it and help by talking it up with your friends.

- Middle East Conference for NWFZ The 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference resolved to work toward creating a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East. What is required now is for some state to offer to host the meeting in 2012 and settle an agenda and venue. Some of you, please work on that.

- Nuclear Weapons Convention, is the most important item on the world's agenda. A model convention already exists, which you can read online. It would bind states never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, otherwise acquire, deploy, stockpile, retain, or transfer" nuclear materials or delivery vehicles and not to fund nuclear weapons research. Further, they would destroy any nuclear weapons they possess.

Not surprisingly, most Nuclear Weapons States say they are not ready for this yet.

Probably Douglas Roche's proposal is the most promising way forward. He would have a core group of countries call their own conference and invite interested states. This work could evolve into a full-scale international conference.

Canada has a knack for this kind of thing. The "Ottawa Process" is how the Landmines Treaty came about. Let's do it again. Let's ask our government to invite experts from like-minded states to Ottawa to start work on something truly stupendous. Just think how much happiness we will create in the world that way, for them and for us! Let's go for it.