

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND OTHER CHEERFUL THINGS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE

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Thank you very much to the ACCC for this opportunity to speak with you, particularly this week as we commemorate the two occasions when nuclear weapons were used on human populations, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I chose the title partly because we seem to be bombarded with not very cheerful things in the news every day, so much so that it's very tempting to switch off totally, even for people of faith for whom hope is, or should be, a driving force. But if we do switch off from the burdens and problems that this world is currently carrying, then those problems will become even more entrenched, and our children and grandchildren will inherit a fairly messed up planet.. That is not an option, so we have no choice but to turn things around. To do that we need hope that it's possible, and I believe there exists good reason for us to hope. I'm going to focus mostly on the issue of nuclear weapons, but also broaden the scope a little.

I chose the title also because I believe that humour is one of humanity's finest qualities, even as we grapple with the dark problems that we've created for ourselves. I'm sure that St. Paul referred to faith, hope, love and humour as the four most important qualities, but the fourth one got lost in translation somewhere.

I want to say at the outset that my own theological understanding is extremely simple (as I've probably just demonstrated). I once heard our responsibility as Christians described as "being God's hands and feet", the mechanism through which his love will be shown to the world, and that is a love that extends to every person on the planet, including those whom we are encouraged to call our enemies. That summarises my approach.

First, a summary of the nuclear weapons problem. Nuclear weapons are unique. No other weapon, even biological or chemical weapons, comes remotely close to causing the death and destruction threatened by a single nuclear weapon.

What do nuclear weapons actually do ? At the centre of a nuclear bomb explosion, everything is immediately vaporised by the high temperatures. At Hiroshima ground temperatures reached 11,000 degrees F. There is an immediate blast and shock wave that spreads outwards, causing the collapse of buildings and other structures and flying debris, then intense firestorms fanned by hurricane force winds. For the victims, the injuries include blast effects, burns and multiple fractures, and possibly blindness from the intense flash of light that occurs. Within days or weeks radiation sickness sets in. For the vast majority of the injured who survive, there will be no medical care, not even pain relief. Later effects include an increased rate of cancers, and likely genetic effects. At Hiroshima and Nagasaki, over 200,000 people had died by the end of 1945 from the effects of the two bombings.

Nuclear bombs have been described in many ways over the decades, but I think the best description is that from the Indian writer Arundhati Roy, on the occasion of her own country's entry to the nuclear weapons club, an occasion that was very distressing for her and many other Indians. She said "The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made. If you are religious, then remember that this bomb is Man's challenge to God. It's worded quite simply: We have the power to destroy everything that You have created."

I want to give a quick snapshot of the devastating impacts thus far of nuclear weapons, quite apart from the terrible health consequences of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings:

- Economically: between \$5.5 and 6 trillion (thousand billion) have been spent on nuclear weapons programs in the US alone, from the early 1940s to 1996, and still approximately \$40 billion are spent annually in the US; add in the spending of the other 8 nuclear weapons states, and there's an unconscionable diversion of funding from areas of human need.
- The health effects of nuclear weapons testing, which, it has been estimated, will cause the excess cancer deaths of approximately 2.4 million people, mostly in the northern hemisphere
- The health and environmental effects of the many thousands of tons of high level nuclear waste produced by nw development, a problem for which we have no resolution.
- The psychological effects on generations of young people living in fear of nuclear war.

In relation to nw testing, I want to mention that the development of nuclear weapons has had a disproportionate impact on indigenous people of this country and elsewhere. A study titled "Radioactive Heaven and Earth; The health and environmental effects of nuclear weapons testing in, on and above the earth", released in 1991 by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in the US, concluded that "Health consequences of nuclear weapons testing have fallen most heavily on minority, rural and disenfranchised populations because governments have tended to situate their test sites in remote areas inhabited by such groups."

The United States has tested in the Marshall Islands, then in Nevada on land claimed by the Shoshone Indians. The United Kingdom tested in the Pacific and in areas of Australia inhabited by aboriginal people. France put its test sites in its colonies – first in Algeria and then in the Pacific. The principal Soviet test site was in Kazakhstan, home to the Kazakhs. The Chinese test site at Lop Nor similarly is in an area inhabited by a national minority.

The study continued "The willingness shown by nuclear weapons powers to subject people to fallout, and to leave large quantities of nuclear materials underground without any serious study of potential harm to future generations, are two broad symptoms of that disregard."

Despite all that, have nw's actually protected us ? There is a belief among some that they have, but evidence does not support that belief.

General Lee Butler was head of the US Strategic Air Command and thus had command of all US Air Force and Navy nuclear weapons from 1992 to 1994. He once stated, “Nuclear weapons did not, and will not, of themselves, prevent major wars, and their presence unnecessarily prolonged and intensified the Cold War.” Certainly nuclear weapons did not prevent the wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands, or Iraq, nor the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, among others, all of which involved nuclear weapons states. In fact nuclear weapons, or even the possible *threat* of them, were one of the *causes* of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and are now playing a similar role in relation to Iran.

So what’s the current situation ? Well, the nuclear weapons problem did not go away with the end of the Cold War, despite the unprecedented opportunity that that time in history gave us. In fact, the problem has become more entrenched in recent years.

There are approximately 26,000 nuclear weapons, in a total of 9 countries. They are Russia, the USA, France, the UK, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Russia and the US have about 96% of the total between them. Russia has around 15,000 (many of them not actively deployed, but nevertheless still in existence), the USA 10,000 (many of them also not actively deployed), France 350, the UK 200, China 130, Israel up to 200, India and Pakistan about 50 each, and North Korea between 0 and 10. (Note that Iran has none, but its arsenal of zero weapons is apparently more of a threat to the world than the US arsenal of around 10,000 weapons, which President Bush says he is prepared to use. Go figure that one.)

Our danger is in fact greater now in some significant respects, even though the number of weapons has reduced significantly since the height of the Cold War, when the total was around 70,000 weapons ? One could ask whether any of us feel safer in a world that has “only” 26,000 nuclear weapons ? I’m not sure about you, but I don’t. Importantly, our danger relates not only to the number of weapons, but also to the policies for their use and that’s where things become alarming.

In its 2002 Nuclear Posture Review, the US named seven countries (some of them non-nuclear weapons states) against whom it would be prepared to use nuclear weapons. France and the UK have both in recent years announced their readiness to use nuclear weapons in response to the threat of terrorism (whatever that word can mean in this context, more on that in a moment). The British parliament voted last year to renew the Trident submarine, at the same time that there are desperate efforts to persuade Iran that these weapons have no utility and are not to be tolerated.

Over 4,000 weapons in the US and Russia remain on high alert, which means that they could be launched within 15 minutes of a perceived attack. With deterioration in Russian command and control systems since the end of the Cold War, nuclear war by accident, technical malfunction or human error are distinct possibilities.

We know that humans make errors of judgement, especially when under tension. Former US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara has described the Cuban Missile Crisis, during which, he says, we came a hair’s breadth from absolute disaster. He says there were huge miscalculations on both sides. As we contemplate the quality of decisions made in the world today, the possibility of mis-judgement becomes

frighteningly real. (One of my messages of hope is that President Bush has only 166 days to go, until January 20, not that we're counting.)

There is the US missile defence system, which is greatly increasing tensions, especially between Russia and the west.

Nuclear terrorism

I'll restrict my use of the word "terrorist" for the moment to refer only to non-state actors. The possibility of terrorists acquiring a nuclear bomb has come to the fore since 2001, although it has long been one of the strong arguments against both nuclear weapons and nuclear power. Nuclear terrorism could take the form of an attack on a nuclear reactor or spent fuel storage facility, which could release catastrophic amounts of radioactivity. Or it could take the form of a 'dirty' bomb – a conventional explosive used to disperse radioactive material, an event that would also have vast repercussions.

I think we could **summarise** nw's as being irrelevant in addressing any of the major threats the world faces....climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, hunger, terrorism.... . They are worse than irrelevant, as they distract attention and resources from real solutions to these problems. They create pretexts for war...Iraq, Iran, tension with N Korea. And they are worse than useless against terrorists

To sum up our situation: The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, including 18 Nobel Laureates, in January this year moved the hands of its Doomsday Clock from 7 to 5 minutes to midnight. The editors wrote:

'Not since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices. North Korea's recent test of a nuclear weapon, Iran's nuclear ambitions, a renewed US emphasis on the military utility [of nuclear weapons], the failure to adequately secure nuclear materials, and the continued presence of some 26,000 nuclear weapons in the United States and Russia are symptomatic of a larger failure to solve the problems posed by the most destructive technology on Earth.'

There have been several high level reports in recent years on the problem of nuclear weapons, including the 1996 report of the Canberra Commission and, more recently, the report of the UN Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission chaired by Hans Blix. They have come to the same conclusions

- As long as any nation has nuclear weapons, other nations will want them
- Nuclear weapons will be used again unless they are abolished
- Any such use would be catastrophic.
- Nuclear weapons must be abolished.

So, our situation is grave, and exacerbated by a terrible sense of complacency and ignorance. There are currently *no* nuclear disarmament talks under way. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke of humanity "sleepwalking to disaster" on this issue.

Can we rely on our leaders to deal with all these problems and ensure our safety ?

An interesting insight into this question, again referring to General Lee Butler, the man who had supreme control over the most powerful nuclear force in the world and who is now an ardent campaigner for nuclear weapons elimination. In 1999 he addressed the Canadian Network for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons as follows:

"Let me begin by simply expressing my appreciation to those of you in this room who have laboured in this vineyard for so many years, most, I suspect, simply understanding intuitively what took years for those of us, presumably experts in this business, to appreciate. And that is that at the heart of the matter nuclear weapons are simply the enemy of humanity....."

So for those of you in the NGO community, I tell you right at the outset, that I personally take heed and encouragement from what you have done so assiduously all these years. I say in the same breath that for most of my life, certainly my years in uniform, I'd never heard of NGOs, and now I suppose I am one."

On another occasion Butler stated that the President (of the USA) had *"..only a superficial understanding of what would happen in a nuclear war"* and that *"Congress knew even less because no lawmaker has ever had access to the war plan, and most academics could only make ill-informed guesses."* In referring to briefings of senior officials, Butler said *"Generally no-one at the briefings wanted to ask questions because they didn't want to embarrass themselves. It was about as unsatisfactory as could be imagined for that subject matter."*

This highlights the absolutely critical role of NGOs in education and advocacy. We can't necessarily rely on our governments to act in our best interests, and we can't assume that those with power to unleash hell on earth really understand the awful nature of that power.

I'm going to digress briefly from nuclear weapons for a moment, and touch on two other issues before offering my thoughts on hope and moving forward.

The first is cluster bombs, and the reason we can take hope from these terrible devices.. You are probably aware that that there was recently concluded, in Dublin in May agreement for a treaty to ban them. The reason I raise this is that the need to protect innocent people from the effects of these weapons prevailed over political considerations. Predictably, some of the big users of these weapons will not come on board immediately.....But, as with the Mine Ban Treaty that banned landmines, the treaty will set a new standard of international behaviour to which countries must adhere if they wish to earn the respect of other nations. Deaths and injuries from landmines have reduced significantly since the landmine treaty, despite the fact that it is not universally accepted. The number of signatory countries grows steadily as landmines become more and more stigmatised.

The other issue I wish to raise is that it is deeply disturbing to note that Armistice Day, November 11, this year will be marked by the opening in Adelaide of the **Asia-Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition**, an arms fair designed to attract buyers from all over the world. Premier Mike Rann describes South Australia's growing military industrial sector as presenting "terrific business and investment opportunities".

With the strong backing of the South Australian government, APDSE will promote the very weapons and technology that perpetuate warfare. It will make armed conflict, violence and suffering more likely by exhibiting highly destructive weapons as a commodity to be bought and sold for commercial gain. New weapons displayed at APDSE will inevitably lead to newer weapons to counteract them.

In 2007, US\$ 1,339 billion was used on military spending – the equivalent of 600 years of the UN's budget. Australia's military spending is over AUD\$ 62 million per day. These extraordinary expenditures on war and preparations for war divert the financial, human, technological and natural resources needed to resolve our real threats, such as poverty, hunger, climate change, and environmental degradation.

APDSE will not promote "Defence and Security", but rather corporate profit at the expense of security. It will be a "Death and Suffering" exhibition.

There is a strong coalition forming specifically to oppose this forthcoming arms fair, and I would encourage all of you to remain informed about it, to take what action you can to make your views on it known. There is a statement available for signature, urging the SA govt and the c'wlth govt to pursue industries that promote life rather than death and I'd welcome signatures for the statement.

Well, what do we have on our side as we address the problem of nuclear weapons, and other threats ? I'm going to present a number of things that give us heart, but they are not in order of priority.

With nw's we have the law on our side

There is the NPT, which obliges the five signatory nuclear weapons states -the US, Russia, China, France and the UK - to get rid of their weapons. The difficulty is that they are not being held sufficiently accountable to their obligations, including by their allies such as Australia. The NPT has weaknesses, especially its promise of civilian nuclear technology to member states, because we know that the so-called peaceful and military nuclear sectors have very strong links. Nevertheless the NPT remains in place as a statement of the need for nw abolition.

The International Court of Justice, in 1996 gave an advisory opinion on the legal status of nuclear weapons, and stated that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. The court emphasised the point that an illegal act must be neither committed nor threatened. In other words if, as the Court concluded, the use of nuclear weapons is generally illegal, then the threat to use them is also illegal. Mexico's ambassador in addressing the Court, stated "Torture is not a permissible response to torture. Nor is mass rape acceptable retaliation to mass rape."

There are very many other acts and statements of rejection of nuclear weapons. Parliamentarians in Belgium and Germany are calling for the withdrawal of US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. Plans to replace the British Trident are coming under fire, including in the Scottish parl. .

One of the most significant developments is the call for nuclear weapons abolition from Cold War warriors, such as Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn and William Perry. Their efforts seem to have given the call for abolition renewed legitimacy and vigour among governments.

Churches have long been very strong, although not unanimous, voices for nuclear weapons abolition since 1945. In 2006, the World Council of Churches meeting in Brazil, called on member churches to urge governments to pursue nuclear weapons abolition and for the churches themselves to work to overcome the ignorance and complacency on this subject, especially to raise awareness among those too young to have memory of what these weapons do.

In the US, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, one of the leaders of the religious nuclear disarmament movement wrote, "Hiroshima challenged my faith as a Christian in a way I am only now beginning to understand. That awful event and its successor at Nagasaki sank into my soul. He continued,"The intention alone to wage nuclear war is an inconceivable sin. That intention can never be morally justified.....If we cannot morally use these weapons, how can we justify having them?"

In July this year, the World Conference of Religions also called on the nuclear weapons states to fulfil their responsibility to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Another powerful movement is the Mayors for Peace, a movement that began in Hiroshima and is currently led by the Mayor of Hiroshima Mayor Akiba. The Mayors for Peace are calling for nuclear weapons abolition by the year 2020, and there are over 2,000 municipalities throughout the world who have joined.

ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, is a campaign initiated here in Australia, by MAPW, which is calling for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), a treaty to ban all aspects for the development, production, testing, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. It was launched in Melbourne in April last year by former PM Malcolm Fraser, and other launches included the Canberra launch by a group including Bishop George Browning and Bishop Pat Power, whose support is enormously encouraging. A NWC is credible, achievable and long overdue. The only thing lacking is political will.

The name ICAN was chosen because we see this campaign as a campaign of hope. We pose the question 'Can you imagine a world free of nuclear weapons?', and we seek the response "I Can". . I strongly encourage you to visit the ICAN website and, if you belong to a group that would like to become an ICAN partner, that would be a very valuable action. It is not an onerous role, but does help to spread the word about this campaign in a positive way.

ICAN, and the goal of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, are spreading globally and receiving attention at a govt level. Before the election last yr in Aust the ALP promised to "drive the international agenda for a NWC", and the announcement of this very encouraging news drew heavily from ICAN materials.

The announcement from Prime Minister Rudd of an International Non-proliferation and Disarmament Commission is extremely welcome. There is a long way to go, but each step along the way is significant.

I'm going to add some more general comments about hope in our current context.

The first thing I'm going to say is something that is, to me, amazing, and yet obvious. Nuclear weapons have not been used again since 1945. Just think about it. That truly is astonishing. Over 6 decades of dedicated research, testing, production and development, over five and a half trillion dollars spent in one country alone, over 70,000 weapons at their peak, and not a single one ever used, except as a threat and a political tool. Could one imagine any other human endeavour that has been so unconscionably wasteful ?

Now why have these weapons not been used since 1945 ? There is ample evidence that at least one of the reasons, and almost certainly a very significant one, is public opinion – in other words people power, if you want to use a more upbeat term. Imagine the political consequences for any government that dared to cross the nuclear threshold. There would be unimaginable public outrage, and governments thus far have known that. In a wonderful book “Resisting the Bomb”, volume two, the American historian Lawrence Wittner has documented a wealth of evidence on this subject, the impact of public thinking on governments throughout the world from 1954 to 1970. (To my knowledge he hasn't yet finished volume three to update the picture !)

The point I want to emphasise is that the voices of the peace and disarmament movements have already had a powerful effect, despite the continued existence of nuclear weapons. There is widespread awareness that these weapons are immoral and must not be used. I hasten to add that that awareness, while enormously powerful, is *not* sufficient guarantee that these weapons will never be used. As with the Cuban Missile Crisis, when tensions run high, judgements may be faulty, and particularly if these weapons are in the hands of a leader who cares not for even his own people let alone others, then our danger is extreme. Therefore we must build on what has already been achieved..

The next comments I want to make were prompted by a fascinating recent book, “The Human Potential for Peace”, by the anthropologist Douglas Fry, who counters the commonly held myth that mankind is innately warlike and that that will not change. Fry examines in detail the available evidence on conflict resolution strategies in a very large number of human societies. He reports on a wealth of cross-cultural information on conflict management, reconciliation and peace-making from around the world, and concludes that humans have a tremendous capacity for resolving conflicts without violence

In an amusing anecdote from one of many non-warring societies, Fry quotes a conversation between another researcher and a man of the Batek people of Malaysia, a hunter-gatherer group who abhor interpersonal violence. The Batek man was asked why their ancestors had not shot the Malay slave-raiders who plagued them until the 1920s. The man was shocked by the question and answered, “Because it would kill them!”.

The claim that humanity is not innately violent is supported also by our own observations. All of us encounter conflicts with other people in our lives, but it is uncommon for conflicts to be settled with physical force. In most societies, violence in fact constitutes a very small part of social life. Murder tends to be reported precisely because it is a relatively rare event in human interactions. Peaceful resolution of disputes tends not to be reported as frequently, partly because it's not as exciting, but also because it's commonplace.

One of the important observations Fry makes is that the degree of peacefulness-aggression in a given society is not immutably fixed in time, but can change depending on various influences. A modern example of this is the frequent observation that levels of violence are high in communities where stockpiles of small arms remain after civil war or where arms control measures are weak. That is, armed violence is much more common where the means to kill and injure are readily available. For example, in the year 1990, homicide rates, per 100,000 people, were 1.1 for Denmark, 10 for the US and 40 for El Salvador. In Australia, in the wake of the terrible massacre at Port Arthur in Tasmania, the government took strong and effective and commendable actions to restrict firearm ownership.

The message is that communities can both learn and un-learn what are appropriate methods of conflict resolution.

Let us look at some other examples from recent human history that might indeed give us hope. Just over 200 years ago, in the late 1700s, a dozen or so activists gathered in London to discuss the abolition of an institution that was deeply ingrained in society, was regarded as part of the natural order of things, and was in addition very profitable for the wealthy. It was of course slavery, and the belief that some races were superior to others. The challenge for those activists, initially very few in numbers, was to expose the cruelty and the inhumanity of the system, and to substitute a vision of a better society. They succeeded because their arguments were irrefutable, and they persisted decade after decade.

The abolition of slavery is of course only one of many human struggles against evils that seemed so deeply ingrained that they were immutable. The abolition of apartheid was a victory of hope over despair. If Nelson Mandela, in his many long years in Robben Island, or the countless others who took part in that protracted struggle, had given up hope, the cause would have been lost. The civil rights movement in the US, and the persistent refusal of all those who took part in it to be humiliated, remains another beacon of hope for us all, as of course does Gandhi's non-violent resistance to the injustices of the British Empire. And the end of the Cold War demonstrates perhaps more than any other event in recent times how changeable the status quo really is.

Jonathan Schell, in his book 'The Unconquerable World: How peaceful protest is stronger than war' states that the 20th century was not only the century of total violence but it was also a century of non-violent action. He cites many examples, including the Vietnam War, where the impotence of the world's best equipped armed forces stood in stark contrast to the power of public opinion. Schell says that in 1968, when Richard Nixon was preparing to take office as President, and when it was

known, even years before the final humiliating end, that the US was losing the war, Nixon asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "Where was the war lost?" Rusk answered, "In the editorial rooms of this country".

The greatest protest marches in human history have related to war and weapons of mass destruction. The largest was on February 15, 2003, when at least 11 million people marched in nearly 800 cities, and in every continent in an attempt to prevent the invasion of Iraq. The second largest recorded demonstration in human history was in 1982 when approximately one million people marched in New York city to demand nuclear disarmament. The fact that those marches were unsuccessful in achieving their immediate goals simply reinforces the fact, of which we are painfully aware, that the struggle for peace offers no guarantees in the short term. As with the struggles to overcome slavery, apartheid and other evils, the road is long.

There are many fine words written about hope. I think some of the finest come from Howard Zinn, an American historian who was fired from his position at Spelman College in Atlanta in the US in 1963 for his civil rights activities, and decades later was invited back to address a graduation ceremony. He has written on "The optimism of Uncertainty". He writes,

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasise in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many - where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction."

Even among this group this evening - a tiny microcosm of the human family - there is much wisdom, integrity, compassion, learning, advocacy skills and everything else this planet needs for survival. And yet sometimes I think we use only a fraction of the gifts we've been given rather than using them to the full for the common good. Humanity has choices to make. Our future is not pre-ordained, but will depend on the sorts of choices we make now.

Bernard Lown is the co-founder of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. He once said, "When terrorists take hostage a single human being, there is a world outcry. Why", he said, "is there no seething rage at the abomination of holding humankind dangling over the nuclear abyss?" He went on to say that if we are to prevail, "We must never delegate in the presence of challenge, and never whisper in the presence of wrong."