

Stopping the spread: Can We Do It?

16 March 2010

I very much welcome this meeting to discuss the two upcoming global nuclear conferences, President Obama's nuclear security conference in Washington next month and the five year review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in New York in May. And I particularly welcome the fact that the FCO has invited members of UNYSA and of our Young Professionals Network to discuss these issues which are so crucial to international peace and security. The value of UNYSA's 'Stop the Spread' campaign, which is an integral part of UNA's 'Towards Zero' movement, is thus being recognised as it deserves to be. All of us at UNA are inspired by the work of Global Zero, whose conference I attended in Paris last month; by President Obama's speech in Prague just a year ago; and by the resolution adopted at the Security Council summit last September which gave solid support to the Prague agenda. Now the time has come to move from words to decisions and to take effective action to restart moves towards multilateral nuclear disarmament and to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Why is this so important? Why do we need to fight our way through the thicket of technicalities to the underlying political realities? Because for ten years now the initially promising post-Cold War nuclear disarmament process has been stalled; and indeed has in some areas been put into reverse. Because the thirteen steps to which the five recognised nuclear weapons states committed themselves at the NPT Review conference in 2000 have remained just words on paper; because two countries, North Korea and Iran, are trying to break out of their NPT obligations; because a world-wide revival of civil nuclear construction which is needed anyway if carbon emission reduction targets are to be met, could bring proliferation risks. If we cannot meet those challenges with effective action, we risk seeing a series of regional nuclear arms races in already highly unstable and combustible parts of the world; and the erosion of the NPT, one of the cornerstones of international peace and security over the past forty years.

Of course not everything will be achieved at these two major conferences in the next two months. We are talking about an agenda which will stretch across years, indeed decades. What is needed now is a decisive change in the direction of travel, a clear signal that we have put behind us the unravelling process of the last ten years, the first steps along a road that could lead ultimately to a world free of nuclear weapons.

We at UNA welcomed the Government's paper 'The Road to 2010' published last summer. But we would like to see the Government go further at the two conferences which lie ahead. Here are some areas in which we would like to see progress made:

- We believe serious consideration should be given by the nuclear weapons states to No First Use commitments and to declaring that the sole purpose of them continuing to have nuclear weapons is to deter others who have such weapons;
- We would like to see strengthened Negative Security Assurances given by the nuclear weapons states to non-nuclear weapons states through a new Security Council Resolution;
- We believe the government should adopt as its own the newly formulated twenty steps towards nuclear disarmament set out in the recent Australian-Japanese report "Eliminating Nuclear Threats" and press other nuclear weapons states to do likewise;
- We hope consideration could be given to breaking the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament over beginning negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, if necessary by proceeding on a more restricted basis;
- We believe some first procedural steps could be made towards exploring the scope for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East;
- We would hope that concrete progress could be made towards implementing a scheme or schemes which would make internationally guaranteed supplies of uranium enrichment and reprocessing services available to any civil nuclear users who were fulfilling all their international obligations;

- We want to see the IAEA's Additional Protocol universally applied and if necessary becoming a condition of supply; and the IAEA given the resources necessary to apply it rigorously and effectively;
- We believe withdrawal from the NPT should become a costly and not a cost-free option, with such action being regarded as a *prima facie* threat to international peace and security.

Not all the actions needed to signal that decisive change to the direction of travel will come from these two big conferences. Conclusion of the START Follow-on Treaty negotiations between the US and Russia would make an important contribution. As could publication of the United States' Nuclear Posture Review which is expected within weeks. And so could renewed indications of our own government's willingness to join in future multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and of our intention to handle the future of our nuclear deterrent in a way fully consistent with moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

UNA would hope that the discussion which we are having today could be part of a wider national debate; and that we could see a cross-party consensus emerging on the way ahead which would leave behind us the divisions of the past and which would enable Britain to play a full and constructive role in negotiations which will determine whether the world is to become a more secure or a much more dangerous place.