

Talk to Scottish Parliamentary CND group

Bailie George Regan, Dundee City Council and Chair of Nuclear Free Local Authorities

MSP's, colleagues,

My name is Bailie George Regan and I am a Dundee City Councillor and the Chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities - covering Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales. I would like to thank the Secretary of the Scottish Parliament's Nuclear Disarmament Group for inviting me to speak to you today on the crucial issue of nuclear disarmament.

I think we can realistically say that we are at a potentially ground-breaking moment in the nuclear weapons debate. Last week's historic United Nations Security Council resolution, seeking the building of firmer steps towards a nuclear weapons free world, gives great hopes of real progress in this area. The public statements of President Obama, President Medvedev, Prime Minister Gordon Brown and President Sarkozy have gone further in pledging momentum for nuclear weapons disarmament than at any time since the end of the Cold War exactly 20 years ago this month. Concerns though over nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea highlight the real urgency in this debate.

The next 8 months is a fundamentally important time in the nuclear weapons debate. In May 2010, at the United Nations, the five-yearly review of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty takes place. The NPT, as it is usually called, is the cornerstone of the international counter-proliferation regime to reduce nuclear weapons. By it, the nuclear weapons states pledge to reduce their own nuclear weapons stockpiles whilst the much larger non-nuclear states group pledge not to develop any nuclear weapons of their own. The last NPT in 2005 was a real disappointment with logjam and recriminations. Indeed its failure, and the then United States governments 'axis of evil' foreign policy has probably done more to encourage Iran and North Korea to seek to develop nuclear weapons because of fear of an American attack than anything else.

This year though the atmosphere has changed. For the first time since the United States built and used a nuclear bomb, we now have an American President who has stated his long-term foreign policy aim as being for a nuclear weapons free world. He has further said that the USA will sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty – 150 states have now signed this treaty – and negotiate a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia. At the NPT Preparatory Conference held at the United Nations, which I was privileged to attend, it was clearly obvious that this new conciliatory atmosphere was bearing fruit. The agenda for next year's conference was agreed in record time, allowing for more fundamental discussion on the nitty-gritty issues of

disarmament. As Chair of the NFLA we joined an international local government delegation under the auspices of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki led Mayors for Peace organisation. I was humbled to hear the words of both the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the Conference – the vast majority of the world are members of what Mayor Akiba of Hiroshima called the ‘Obamajority’ who want to see a nuclear weapons free world. Over 25 UN Ambassadors were also lobbied at the Conference to seek official adoption of the Hiroshima Nagasaki Protocol. This document seeks to build on the NPT by developing a Nuclear Weapons Convention by 2015 and the elimination of all nuclear weapons by 2020 – the Mayors for Peace ‘2020 Vision’. I hope it can be formally tabled for next year’s conference.

I am pleased that Gordon Brown has responded to the challenge of President Obama. His announcement that the number of Trident nuclear submarines will be reduced from 4 to 3 is a step in the right direction and it should be welcomed. I do believe as well, with the deep recession in the UK there will be opportunity to put pressure on the UK Government - regardless of who wins next May - to reduce commitments for an expensive replacement of Trident even further. In the NFLA we do want to see cuts in nuclear weapons go much further and I do believe that the current multilateral approach does offer the best hope at present for a nuclear weapons free world, but only if concerted international pressure is kept on

all the nuclear weapon states, including Israel, India, Pakistan and the likes of Iran and North Korea.

I often hear from cynics that nuclear weapons disarmament is an impossible objective. Well, we have a convention on landmines, we have a convention on chemical and biological weapons and shortly we may have a convention on cluster bombs. Cynics said none of those could ever happen. In each case a cleverly constructed international consensus was established and slowly, but surely, this led to effective political support and a practical solution. I do believe the recipe and the ingredients for this is there on the nuclear weapons issue, but only if that international consensus can be translated into effective political action in the next few months.

That is why it is critical that Parliamentarians get involved in the debate. And Scotland has an essential part to play in this debate. The UK nuclear weapons deterrent 'Trident' is stationed in Scotland at the Faslane naval base. There is a cross-party and a wide public consensus in Scotland to support effective nuclear weapons disarmament. The financial costs of Trident are also prohibitive and affect Scotland. Councils of every hue have to make some very difficult decisions at present and frontline services are under threat. Spending on Trident in the next 10 years is likely to cost £20 billion, and groups like Greenpeace suggest it will be a lot more. Local Councils, supported by their MSP's, should lobby Government to spend

these precious resources on frontline services and not on Trident replacement.

Last month I was privileged to visit the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to attend the World Mayors for Peace Conference on behalf of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities. To see the effects of nuclear weapons through the archives in their respective Peace Museums would be enough for anyone to be involved in seeking to eliminate them; to see as well though the love and the friendship and the reconciliation from the peoples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought a tear to my eye. Their message should be heard by all. As MSP's, encourage your Councils to join the NFLA and the Mayors for Peace. As Mayor Akiba and Mayor Taue say – let there be 'No more Hiroshima's' and 'No more Nagasaki's'. A world without nuclear weapons by 2020 is a realistic aim and I encourage the Scottish Parliamentary Nuclear Disarmament group to work with the NFLA and Mayors for Peace to support such an aim. As President Obama often says – 'Yes we can!'

Thank you for listening.