



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 12th December 2013

NFLA tribute to Nelson Mandela – a true advocate of nuclear weapons disarmament

Many tributes have been made in the past few days about the sad death of former South African President and Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela. The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) would like to add to those tributes and sends its deepest sympathies to his family and to the people of South Africa.

The NFLA's respect for Nelson Mandela derives partly from the positive role he played in the international campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

NFLA note that, following Mandela's release from prison, South Africa took three major steps to nuclear disarmament (1):

- 1) It scrapped its nuclear weapons programme, involving the dismantling of six complete and one partially assembled) nuclear device in February 1990, following which South Africa acceded to the United Nations Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and signed a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1991.
- 2) It scrapped its ballistic missile programme, which led to its admission to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 1995.
- 3) It dismantled its biological and chemical warfare programme.

As such, NFLA acknowledges the unique position South Africa occupies in the world as being the first country to have voluntarily dismantled its nuclear weapons capability. It calls on all nuclear weapon states to consider similar actions under the auspices of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The South African decision to scrap its nuclear weapons programme has boosted its moral authority on the issue of non-proliferation and it remains an active part of the international community seeking to build a nuclear weapons free world.

On the 21st September 1998, President Mandela gave an impassioned speech to the United Nations General Assembly calling on the Nuclear Weapon States to make a firm commitment to eliminating nuclear weapons and on the global community to eradicate poverty. He said:

"The very first resolution of the General Assembly, adopted in January 1946, sought to address the challenge of 'the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction'.

We must face the fact that after countless initiatives and resolutions, we still do not have concrete and generally accepted proposals supported by a clear commitment by the Nuclear Weapons States to the speedy, final and total elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capabilities.

We take this opportunity to salute our sister Republic of Brazil for its decision to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and urge all others that have not done so to follow this excellent example.

In an honest attempt to contribute to the definition of the systematic and progressive steps required to eliminate these weapons and the threat of annihilation which they pose, South Africa together with Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden will be submitting a draft resolution to the First Committee for consideration by this Assembly.

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This is appropriately titled: 'Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World: The Need for a New Agenda'.

I call on all members of the United Nations seriously to consider this important resolution and to give it their support. We must ask the question, which might sound naive to those who have elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction - why do they need them anyway!

In reality, no rational answer can be advanced to explain in a satisfactory manner what, in the end, is the consequence of Cold War inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force, to assert the primacy of some States over others." (2)

As the world remembers the legacy of Nelson Mandela, the NFLA publicises this speech at a time of slow progress in moves to reduce current stockpiles of nuclear weapons. We hope Mr Mandela may rest in peace.

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"The anti-apartheid and the anti-nuclear weapons movements were greatly enhanced by the pivotal role played by Nelson Mandela. Both movements arose out of a feeling of injustice that powerful States were ignoring the will of the great majority of the people of this world. Mandela was instrumental in leading South Africa to a democratic future and removing its capacity to be a nuclear weapon state. NFLA will work with Mayors for Peace, other groups and national governments to fulfil Mandela's wish for a world free from nuclear weapons. "

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) – Nuclear Disarmament in South Africa
<http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/south-africa-nuclear-disarmament>
- (2) Transcript of speech by President Mandela to the United Nations General Assembly, 21st September, 1998. Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory:
http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_views.asp?ItemID=NMS631&PG=item

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