



Willy Brandt Lecture 2020

Germany and the International Nuclear Disarmament Regime

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It is an incredible honour to be with you today and I am very thankful to Willy Brandt Foundation for this opportunity, in particular since Willy Brandt and ICAN share something crucial – a deep concern about nuclear weapons and a commitment to ending this threat. And, of course, a Nobel Peace Prize.

I want to spend today talking a bit about the threat of nuclear weapons, and how negotiating agreements and working multilaterally can dramatically change behavior of governments and really – shift how the world works.

I will be discussing the humanitarian, the rational and the legal arguments against nuclear weapons and for the treaty to prohibit them. Each element is certainly distinct, but I also hesitate to separate them. It's important that we understand that the humanitarian argument informs and enhances the rational and legal arguments. The legal argument is rooted in humanitarian law, which is anchored by shared moral and rational values. The rational argument actively supports legal implementation and reasonable decisions based in the greatest moral and humanitarian good.

The fact is all these pieces together form a coherent, comprehensive and reasonable argument for nuclear abolition.

The Humanitarian Argument

We began our journey to the treaty where all discussion of nuclear weapons must begin: the devastating, almost unimaginable, humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use.

The nuclear threat can feel so overwhelming and the destruction so complete that the public's instinctive response is denial and immobilization.

Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently explained:

The fact that most of the time human beings put the truth about the nature and risks of the nuclear war out of their minds because it is too painful and therefore not "acceptable", does not alter the nature and risks of such war.

This does not mean we should shy away from discussing nuclear weapon's unmatched ability to cause immediate mass casualties. Even in a relatively sparse population, one nuclear warhead would cause anywhere from 10,000 to 300,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of injuries. "Utter obliteration at worst."

But we must also communicate the nightmarish reality for those left behind, not everyone will die, someone will have to face the aftermath.

The immediate effects of a nuclear blast would be devastating. Those that don't die in the fires of the initial blast, or in agony in the days following, could face death for years to come in the forms of radiation poisoning, cancers, environment change and food scarcity.

Recent climate modelling shows that a relatively limited nuclear exchange would result in a nuclear winter lasting 2-3 years. Beyond the unacceptable immediate deaths from nuclear weapons, millions more would die from the resulting famine. Our food system would collapse and our societies are likely to follow. The effects of radiation on human beings would cause suffering and death decades after the initial explosion.

"The Stone Age at best."

Our colleagues, the three-time Nobel Peace Prize laureates of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent have made clear that the destruction resulting from a nuclear exchange would be devastating beyond anything we have seen before. No adequate humanitarian response would be possible. This has also been confirmed by the United Nations' own relief agencies who have said they would have to withdraw staff and could not send any into the affected area.

The Cold War faceoff between US and Soviet made total nuclear war the most probable scenario if even one missile was launched. Now we face a world where the nuclear threat has spread and it is just as likely that a "limited exchange" will create calamitous long-term effects for billions.

Sadly, we do not have to resort to models to understand the long-term consequences of nuclear weapons.

Kazakhstan recently ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The Soviets used their country as an atmospheric and underground testing site for 40 years. The 456 warheads detonated at Semipalatinsk-21 have harmed generations of Kazakhs.

In that area, one in every 20 children are born with serious deformities. Sickness increases every time the wind picks up and blows over the "Atomic Lake."

The selection of most testing sites including Kazakhstan, and the Pacific Proving grounds like the Bikini Atoll, Australia and surrounding islands, or French Polynesia and Algiers was rooted in colonialism and racism. The expression of this injustice has come

in the targeting and testing of nuclear weapons on indigenous communities and those deemed subhuman by ruling powers. Many of the Kazakhs I mentioned earlier were ordered to stand outside as warheads exploded, when they complained of sickness, birth defects and even deaths, they were told it was due to their inferior genes.

It is not unfamiliar to black, indigenous and people of colour to suffer or even die from the structures of "security and protection".

Those who care about justice must speak out against the injustice of nuclear arms.

Nuclear weapons are instruments of inequality and tools of oppressive patriarchy. Though the weapons are indiscriminate, the impact is not. Women and girls disproportionately have borne the impact of nuclear testing and attack.

Women in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had nearly double the risk of developing and dying from solid cancer due to ionising radiation exposure according to studies. Women face increased risk in childbirth with a greater likelihood of stillbirth and physical malformations to the child leading to increased maternal mortality.

Robust research on the impact of radiation indicate that children have a higher risk of cancer from fallout, and girls are considerably more likely than boys to develop thyroid cancer.

These are the direct risks to women and girls of nuclear war, but we know from past and current conflicts that women and girls carry the burden of war and instability with a heightened risk of exploitation and sexual violence that goes hand-in-hand with displacement and the breakdown of institutions.

Yet women's voices have been nearly absent in the decision-making regarding nuclear weapons, from the research, development, from deciding where to test, where to use these weapons, to the politicians and military that continues to maintain these weapons today.

And not only are women impacted by radiation and absent from much of the decision-making around these weapons, Nuclear weapons are also culturally strongly linked to ideas of masculinity and power. This becomes especially evident in discussions about disarmament.

When Barack Obama spoke of a nuclear weapon-free world, he was accused of "castrating" the nation, and after the Indian nuclear test in 1998, a Hindu-nationalist leader declared; "We had to prove that we are not eunuchs". And a couple of years ago Donald Trump tweeted about having a bigger nuclear button than North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, resembling a phallic symbol.

As Carol Cohn wrote in 2017 in "The perils of mixing masculinity and missiles"; "Ideas about masculinity and femininity matter in international politics, in national security and in nuclear strategic thinking. Mr. Trump — with his fragile ego and his

particularly obsessive concern with his reputation for manliness — may have brought these dynamics to the surface, but they have been there all along, if in less crude and lurid ways.”

The same obsession can also be seen in Vladimir Putin's posing with his shirt off while doing “manly” activities such as fishing and hunting.

As promoters of disarmament and the nuclear ban treaty we know this rhetoric all too well. We are often accused of being naive and idealistic, while our opponents are realists and responsible.

This gendered language with sexist undertones is part of a rhetoric that aims to diminishing and ridicule us as relevant actors.

Those who care about gender equality must speak out against nuclear weapons too.

And even if a nuclear weapon were never again exploded over a city, there are intolerable effects from the production, testing and deployment of nuclear arsenals that are experienced as an ongoing personal and community catastrophe by many people around the globe. This humanitarian harm, too, must inform and motivate efforts to outlaw and eradicate nuclear weapons.

Finally, there is great immorality at the heart of the current nuclear strategy. High-level discussions about nuclear weapons revolve around sterile and abstract concepts like “deterrence” and “stability.” These words and even, “Mutually assured destruction,” are designed to desensitize us, to numb us to the reality of what is being discussed — indiscriminate mass murder of civilian populations.

It is a gross contradiction that we would never allow a rogue state to threaten to kill thousands of civilians with chemical or biological weapons, but the richest and most powerful democracies routinely implicitly, and recently explicitly, threaten to exterminate millions and destroy the earth.

In addition to being immoral, these threats only increase tensions. It's hard to blame fragile states for seeking nuclear capabilities when they have heard the message for decades that nuclear weapons increase power and security.

As Pope Francis said in his communication to our treaty negotiating conference, “We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples.”

The only nuclear policy that increases security is the only humane, rational and responsible one: the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

Rational Argument

Though we have examined the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, we still must wrestle with naysayers who simultaneously accept that a world without nuclear weapons is preferable, even necessary, whilst claiming it is impossible.

The very first UN resolution, all the way back in 1946 called for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Winston Churchill suggested empowering the UN to control the world's arsenal. The very man who ordered history's only nuclear attack, Harry Truman, turned around to tell Congress that the weapons should be restricted by international agreements and not controlled by one man. And many of the very scientist who worked on the Manhattan Project organized and signed the first petition calling for the abolition of the weapon they had created.

We have seen over 75 years of heads of state pledging to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, most recently when President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to that noble goal and followed their words with the signing of the New START treaty.

We won't live with nuclear weapons forever without them being used with catastrophic consequences.

Right now, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, United Nations, the ICRC, academics and scientists around the world say we're closer to nuclear war than we've ever been before. It might sound strange, when you think back to the Cold War.

But there are more nuclear armed states than ever. Since the Cold War ended, an additional three countries have tested nuclear weapons.

And these nuclear armed states are not only locked into a bipolar power struggle, like the Cold War, but also involved in multiple regional tense situations, like US and North Korea, India and Pakistan, India and China, US and China, US and Russia and more.

In addition, a huge technological development is changing warfare and military operations, in particular cyber warfare and artificial intelligence. These developments are blurring the lines between attacks, speeding up warfare and increasing the risk of mistakes.

Together, these three developments make the current situation extremely dangerous, unpredictable, and unreliable.

If you ask a mathematician, they will tell you the likelihood of nuclear weapons being used at any given time is greater than zero.

Just how likely that risk is fluctuates — the likelihood is higher than it was last year thanks to growing threats of conflict, but that chance is always greater than zero.

That means given enough time it is certain the nuclear weapons will be used.

Let me then ask this question to those who accuse us of being naive and irrational: if you know that this story will end either with the use of nuclear weapons or their elimination, who is the irrational one?

The person who calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons or the person who thinks it is ok to live side by side with them?

We are not naive, we are not irrational.

We simply will not do nothing, for doing nothing is accepting the eventual use of nuclear weapons.

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell said this clearly in noting his opposition to nuclear weapons:

“You may reasonably expect a man to walk a tightrope safely for ten minutes; it would be unreasonable to do so without accident for two hundred years.”

We are going on 75 years of walking this tightrope. Our time is already running out.

And world leaders, even those of the nuclear armed states, know this. They agree, yes, we must work to eliminate nuclear weapons...but no, we can't.

What I see in this message and too often across various issues is a confusion, whether by ignorance or design between the 'impossible' and the 'inconvenient'. Efforts toward meaningful change, towards equality and justice is often portrayed as impossible by those in power, those who benefit from keeping things just the way they are. They are trying to discourage us from demanding change.

But change is coming, whether they like it or not. And it is not driven by heads of states, it's driven by regular people.

The Legal Argument

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted by 122 states at the United Nations on July 7 2017 and opened for signature a couple of months later. This is the treaty that we were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for, just regular people that had an idea and a vision and decided to do something about it.

The treaty will 'enter into force' once 50 states have deposited their instruments of ratification, which we expect will happen very soon. We have right now 47 states that has ratified this treaty, and we expect the next 3 to come before the end of the year.

This will be an incredibly important accomplishment; nuclear weapons will be banned

under international law. Together with bio and chemical weapons, this treaty will be the final part of banning of WMDs.

The foundation of the treaty is international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Humanitarian law includes the principle that limits on the methods and means of warfare exist and apply to parties in conflict.

The rule of distinction obligates states to limit targeting to combatants and never civilians. The genesis of the rule traces all the way back to the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868, which seems shocking and quaint now.

Russia had engineered a bullet that would explode on contact with a soft substance. The Russian Government thought the weapon so dangerous and inhuman that they refused to use it in conflict and organized that other nations would reject the weapon in the declaration.

From the very first rules of war we see the injunctions on causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, protecting the natural environment and of course rules governing proportionality.

The UN Charter itself requires states to refrain from not only the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, but even the threat of such force.

I could list treaty after treaty, rule after rule and international, domestic and military laws that are incompatible with the testing and use of nuclear weapons. So the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons not only clarifies that this applies specifically to nuclear weapons, it includes the possession and threatening of use of nuclear weapons as illegal under international law.

Now, I know this moment in history does not seem like a particularly good one for international law and cooperation. But we've been through difficult times before, and what is clear – treaty-based solutions work. Imperfectly, of course. But they work, even if it takes time.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ICAN's strategy follows in the successful footsteps of treaties banning chemical weapons, biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions.

It's part of a wider strategy to continue the work of people like Willy Brandt, to use international law to push forward normative change, to change the rules and change behavior.

History shows that the prohibition of certain types of weapons is the first step towards their elimination.

Weapons that have been outlawed by international treaties are increasingly seen as illegitimate, losing their political status – even if some of the weapons possessing states do not join the treaty.

Arms companies find it more difficult to acquire funds for work on illegal weapons, and such work carries a significant reputational risk. Banks, pension funds and other financial institutions divest from these producers.

Universities involved in this production will also start facing a significant reputational risk, such as the nearly 50 U.S. universities that are involved in the research and design of U.S. nuclear weapons, largely in secret and in contradiction of their mission statements.

This shifting of norms is crucial in international law. We should always seek to enshrine our values and rules in ironclad treaties and national laws, but treaties that express public conscience and principles of humanity have a normative effect globally – even on states that haven't signed the treaty. This will only increase as more states join the Treaty and tighten regulations around supporting nuclear arms manufacturing.

For example, before the entry into force of the landmine treaty, roughly 34 states exported landmines. Since the entry into force of the MBT, there have been no reported landmine transfers. Very few states not party have used landmines or cluster munitions since the prohibition treaties entered into force. In 2014, the United States, a state not party, announced that it would no longer use landmines outside of the Korean Peninsula, or assist, encourage, or induce other nations to use, stockpile, produce, or transfer antipersonnel mines outside of Korea.

The US still has not joined the majority of states signing the Cluster Munitions Ban, but since it's entry into force, the United States has only used cluster munitions once, in an isolated 2009 strike in Yemen. In 2016, it decided to halt transfers of cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia. as of November 2016, no U.S. manufacturer is willing to make the weapons. That was when Textron noted in an SEC filing they were done with cluster munitions because they were bad for business.

The upcoming entry into force of the treaty will not be the end of our work, rather it's the starting point. We now will have the legal basis for achieving nuclear disarmament.

It won't change things over night, but it will for sure have a significant impact shifting the global views on nuclear weapons from "necessary evil" to "unacceptable and illegal".

Because that's what this is all about. Making our system more democratic and more just – leading to peace.

Democracy, Justice and Peace

We should never minimize the destructive force of these weapons. Even one so-called "low-yield" weapon will end tens of thousands of lives and pollute land and water for decades, possibly even centuries.

But we must simultaneously remember that they are just weapons, created by man and we can abolish them for good. While they stand ready to launch at a moment's notice, they are not self-guided and autonomous. They are not magic. Their existence is not inevitable.

Their computer code is written by people, their parts are built by companies with names like Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Airbus and Boeing -- with funding from many of our banks, pension and investment funds.

The research is done by institutions like University of California, MIT, Stanford and other US universities.

The order to launch a nuclear attack is given by our leaders, in the majority of nuclear armed states those are democratically elected.

And maybe most significantly governments like Germany's are currently supporting, and helping nuclear armed countries keep their nuclear weapons. It's commitment to nuclear disarmament is just empty words, unless Germany refuses to be complicit in the threat of using weapons of mass destruction on its people.

Nuclear weapons do not decide themselves. Regular people daily make the decisions to either support or protest these weapons of mass destruction. They decide to facilitate the existence of these weapons, or they decide to make it harder for nuclear weapons to continue to threaten our world. It is a simple choice we're making in our everyday life.

A large part of ICAN's mission has been to bring democracy to disarmament.

Nuclear weapons are by their very nature, and the structures we have put in place — authoritarian. Their use betrays humanity, their continued development betrays reason and their stockpiling betrays democracy.

We are faced with a global health crisis, a climate catastrophe, raging racism and xenophobia, skyrocketing inequality, food shortages, the rise of right-wing authoritarianism, sexism, and the continued use of chemical weapons violating international treaty obligations and norms to name just a few. All of these causes need energy and new voices committed to justice. And of course the threat of mass killing through nuclear attack, which often slips dangerously out of sight as a problem of the past, until it suddenly explodes into the public and threatens to literally explode.

But rather than seeing the nuclear weapons issue as yet another catastrophe on the horizon, we need to see these issues as related. These issues have a few things in common. People in power protect the status quo at the expense of the security and safety of all.

The great myth of the nuclear weapons era was to convince us we have no power, no agency when it comes to the threat of nuclear arms. That the difficult is the impossible, that security is based on fear. They pressed the fallacy that we can maintain our humanity while threatening mass murder to those who cross us, and even genocide as some military allies have done on Twitter. This status quo is irrational, inhumane and untenable.

We must reject nuclear weapons. We must reject security based on fear and luck. We must reject a world order sustained through threats of mass killing and environmental destruction.

« Under the threat of mankind's self-destruction, co-existence has become a question of the very existence of man. Co-existence became not one of several acceptable possibilities but the only chance of survival. » said Willy Brandt in his Nobel Lecture in 1971.

That's why we need to embrace humanitarian law, rationality, a just world order based in cooperation. Not because we're naïve, but because we know what the Nobel Peace Prize committee has known since Alfred Nobel wrote his will, that co-existence - through negotiations, multilateralism, peace agreements and global cooperation, is the pathway to peace.

This is why the Nobel Committee consistently reminds us what works to make the world a better place. They showed us by recognizing Willy Brandt's work to ensure that West Germany signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. They've shown it by recognizing the United Nations and its many agencies, European Union, the ICRC, and just last week, the World Food Programme. And they've shown it through bans on indiscriminate weapons, like the ban on landmines, ban on chemical weapons and through recognizing ICAN's work to achieve the ban on nuclear weapons.

The pathway is clear. And we are ready to walk it towards a safer, and better world.

Thank You.