

The Global Zero campaign

John Dear | Jan. 6, 2009 On the Road to Peace

One day, the nations of the world will beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more, the holy prophet Isaiah wrote 2,700 years ago. On Dec. 8, hundreds of politicians and leaders from around the world gathered in Paris to launch the Global Zero campaign, a new call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. As a new year of the perilous nuclear epoch begins, I regard the gathering as a rare sign of hope. The campaign is calling for millions to join their movement and sign their petition. I did and hope you will too.

This month there will be gatherings in Washington, D.C., and in Moscow. The number of nuclear weapons keeps growing, organizers say, and the possibility of nuclear terrorism remains high. And they insist something can be done. They're demanding a comprehensive agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons worldwide through phased and verified reductions. All of it done in 20 years.

Signatories of the Global Zero campaign include Jimmy Carter, Mikhail Gorbachev, Queen Noor, Archbishop Tutu, former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, businessman Sir Richard Branson, Ehsan Ul-Haq, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Pakistan, and Brajesh Mishra, former Indian National Security Advisor.

They want to put nuclear weapons on the global agenda just as activists got climate change on the global agenda. They undertook a poll in 21 countries and found that an average of 76% of the population favored an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The Global Zero declaration reads:

We, the undersigned, believe that to protect our children, our grandchildren and our civilization from the threat of nuclear catastrophe, we must eliminate all nuclear weapons globally. We therefore commit to working for a legally binding verifiable agreement, including all nations, to eliminate nuclear weapons.

I urge everyone to sign the petition at: www.globalzero.org/sign-declaration [1], and to send out e-mails to 100 contacts urging them to sign the petition and also pass it on.

"This is an historic window of opportunity," organizers write. "We must choose between two very different futures. In one, nuclear weapons continue to spread, increasing the chances that a country or terrorists use them, with catastrophic consequences. In the other, all nuclear weapons are eliminated according to a comprehensive global agreement for phased and verified reductions. When it comes to nuclear weapons, one is one too many."

Barack Obama spoke similarly, addressing 200,000 people in Berlin in July: "This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons." Indeed, many thoughtful people see something of a chink in armament policies. They say we have a greater opportunity to abolish nuclear weapons now than ever before.

In the new issue of *Tikkun* magazine, the progressive Jewish publication edited by Rabbi Michael Lerner, a wide array of writers published their pleas and advice to President-elect Obama. I urged him to pursue this vision of a world without nuclear weapons. "The world looks to you to end the evil war on Iraq, on Inauguration Day," I began.

"You need not obey the warmakers, the military, the generals, and the Pentagon. This need not drag on one day more. You can order the troops home now. For the love of peace, please do so.

But it's just the beginning. The vision of Martin Luther King Jr. demanded the abolition of war itself. We must end starvation, poverty, nuclear weaponry, and global warming. We urge you, therefore, to dismantle every nuclear weapon and weapon of mass destruction, close our hundreds of military bases around the world, sign disarmament treaties with the nations, and deploy the billions of dollars spent on war to rebuild our economy and feed the world's starving masses.

It's doable; it's not a dream. When Nelson Mandela became president, he unilaterally dismantled South Africa's nuclear weapons, as well as abolished the death penalty. Nuclear weapons do not protect us. They steal our resources and incite other nations to build similar weapons. And threat descends on us all. We need our scientists to pursue life-giving research instead. Set them free to study alternative sources of energy that can reverse global warming and heal the earth.

But even more-as we dismantle the imperial war machine and close places like Guantanamo, the School of the Americas, Los Alamos, and Livermore Labs-we need to start funding and institutionalizing nonviolent ways to resolve global conflict. We need to teach nonviolent methods in every United States school. We need to win the world over with our nonviolent love by becoming a force for peace in our world.

The days of war are coming to an end. War is obsolete. It doesn't work. Peace and active nonviolence do. Millions of Americans, especially in the communities of faith and conscience, as well as billions of sisters and brothers around the world, are hoping and praying for a new dawn of peace, the day when the nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more," as the prophet Isaiah wrote long ago.

A good way to fulfill Isaiah's vision and start the new year is to join the Global Zero campaign. I hope we can keep pressuring our government to abolish our weapons of mass destruction, so we can spend those massive resources (about \$40 billion a year, at this point) on food, clothing, medicine, homes, jobs and education for the needy and for the care of the earth itself. This is the work of the spiritual life, the duty, says Isaiah, of all those who seek the God of peace.

John Dear's autobiography, *A Persistent Peace* (Loyola Press) and his new collection of essays on nonviolence, *Put Down Your Sword* (Eerdmans) are available from www.amazon.com [2]. John will be speaking this week at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla. For information, see: www.johndear.org [3].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.globalzero.org/sign-declaration>

[2] <http://www.amazon.com>

[3] <http://www.johndear.org>