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The mayors' call to abolish nuclear weapons

John Dear | Aug. 9, 2011 On the Road to Peace

Nothing is harder than working for peace in a time of war. This month, as we remember the 66th anniversaries of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima on Aug. 6 and Nagasaki on Aug. 9, I take heart in the thousands of people who stand in peace vigils, speak out against war and go to prison for peace -- from Los Alamos to the Pentagon.

I think of my friend Fr. Steve Kelly, a Jesuit priest, sitting in solitary confinement in a federal prison next to the Seattle, Wash., airport. The government has put him in "the shoe," (that is, "the Special Handling Unit," the SHU) because he refuses to cooperate with various prison injustices.

He will be isolated for nearly two more years, alone in his cell, all because of his plowshares disarmament action at the nearby Trident nuclear weapons submarine base. The media, the church and the world ignore him, but the God of peace doesn't.

Meanwhile our friend Fr. Bill "Bix" Bichsel, whom I wrote about recently, is out of prison. He tells me he's feeling fine, and ready for more. He will probably go back to prison this fall when he is sentenced for last year's protest at the Oak Ridge, Tenn., nuclear weapons plant.

Our friend Dominican Sr. Jackie Hudson, however, passed away on Wednesday. A judge allowed her release from prison last month after she became seriously ill and was refused treatment by prison authorities. She was one of the most steadfast peace activists I have ever known.

She had spent much time in prison for two plowshares actions. Last year, she joined one of our peace vigils at Los Alamos. We remember her by continuing to work for disarmament. (See: www.jonahhouse.org, www.gzcenter.org and www.disarmnowplowshares.wordpress.com)

With the world in such turmoil, it's hard to find signs of hope, but they are there if you scratch the surface.

Certainly the recent speech by the Vatican Ambassador to the United Nations, Archbishop Chullikatt, was an astonishing breakthrough. I think it's the best thing said by any church leader in years. (I urge everyone to read *NCR*'s fine coverage and the full text of his speech.) Last week, he invited me to meet with him at the U.N. and to join a U.N. consultation group on disarmament that he is forming. I readily agreed.

Another sign comes from the Air Force itself. After recent revelations, the Air Force has announced it will end its infamous "nuclear ethics" program for new recruits.

Dubbed the "Jesus Loves Nukes" workshop, for decades they used biblical passages to teach Air Forces cadets that God blesses our nuclear weapons and wants us to use them against "enemies." It twisted the book of Revelation, for example, to present Jesus as a "mighty warrior" who wants us to vaporize anyone who threatens the U.S.A.

Along with this blasphemy, the Air Force cited as its main source for "moral authority" none other than Wernher von Braun, a leading Nazi scientist responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews. (See recent posts at: www.truthout.org) At least that propaganda has stopped.

Still another hopeful sign came earlier this summer from the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Thanks to the relentless work of behind-the-scenes peace activists, the mayors issued a strong statement in support of "Mayors for Peace," an international organization based in Hiroshima, Japan, with 4,892 members in 151 countries, including 175 U.S. mayors, who advocate the abolition of nuclear weapons (see: www.mayorsforpeace.org). My friend Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire has nominated this outstanding organization for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, a national association of cities with populations over 30,000 (see: www.usmayors.org), adopted a resolution calling on President Obama to work with the leaders of the other nuclear weapon states to implement the United Nations Secretary-General's five point plan to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2020.

It also called on Congress to terminate funding for the modernization of the nuclear weapons complex and nuclear weapons systems, to slash spending on nuclear weapons well below Cold War levels, and to redirect those funds to meet the urgent needs of our cities.

At their June conference, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon praised the mayors for their support and was given standing ovations at the beginning and conclusion of his speech. "The road to peace and progress runs through the world's cities and towns," the Secretary-General told them.

I called Jackie Cabasso, North American coordinator of Mayors for Peace and executive director for the Western States Legal Foundation, to ask her thoughts about this breakthrough. Jackie is one of the most dedicated anti-nuclear activists in the nation.

"At a time when there seems to be general amnesia about the dangers of nuclear weapons and the reality of the continued U.S. reliance on the threat to use nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of its national security policy," she told me, "the mayors of America have understood the dangers and had the courage to call on the president and the Congress to fundamentally change course on nuclear weapons policy and to free up the billions and billions of dollars that are being poured into insuring that nuclear weapons are with us forever, to reclaim those funds and direct them to where they are really needed -- to America's cities and real human security."

As we remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we join with the Conference of Mayors and the United Nations in a prayer and call for nuclear disarmament. I offer here below the full text of the June 20, 2011, resolution by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. May it inspire all of us to spend our lives, like Sr. Jackie Hudson, in pursuit of nuclear disarmament as we walk the road to peace.

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[Editor's Note: John Dear's column will resume September 6.]

Next year, John Dear will undertake a national book tour for his forthcoming book, *Lazarus Come Forth!*, which portrays Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. To host John for an evening talk and book-signing at your church, send an email through www.johndear.org [1]. John's latest book, *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Orbis), and other recent books are available from www.amazon.com. To contribute to Catholic Relief Services' "Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund," go to: http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn. For further information, or to schedule a lecture or retreat, visit: www.johndear.org.

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Resolution of the U.S. Mayors Conference, June 20, 2011:

CALLING ON THE PRESIDENT TO WORK WITH LEADERS OF OTHER NUCLEAR WEAPON STATES FOR ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY 2020 AND CALLING ON CONGRESS TO CUT FUNDING FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND TO REDIRECT THOSE FUNDS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CITIES

WHEREAS, more than two decades after the end of the Cold War, nearly 23,000 nuclear weapons, over 95% of them in the arsenals of the United States and Russia, continue to pose an intolerable threat to cities and people everywhere;

WHEREAS, recent studies have shown that a nuclear war involving no more than 100 Hiroshima-sized bombs?about 0.3% of the global nuclear arsenal?could have catastrophic, long-lasting effects on the global climate leading to a drop in average surface temperatures, reduction of the ozone layer, a shortened agricultural growing season resulting in a global famine of unprecedented proportions;

WHEREAS, the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review did not lead to substantial changes in the U.S. nuclear force structure, only marginally reduced the role of nuclear weapons in national security policy, explicitly rejected reducing the high-alert status of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and Submarine Launch Ballistic Missiles, and retained the capability to deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on tactical fighter-bombers and heavy bombers, including at NATO bases in Europe, while proceeding with a modification of the bombs carried on those planes;

WHEREAS, a plan submitted to Congress by President Barack Obama projects investments of well over $185 billion by 2020 to maintain and modernize U.S. nuclear weapons systems, including construction of three new nuclear warhead production facilities and an array of new delivery systems;

WHEREAS, although the U.S. stockpile contains one-fifth as many warheads as it used to, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2012 budget request is the largest ever for maintenance and modernization of nuclear warheads, and after accounting for inflation, the $7.63 billion request is 21 percent more than President Ronald Reagan's largest nuclear weapons budget;

WHEREAS, reflecting President Obama's commitment to modernize all three legs of the strategic triad of nuclear weapons delivery systems, the FY 2012 budget request also includes $197 million for research and development on a new Air Force long-range nuclear bomber, $2.6 million to study a future Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, and $1.07 billion to develop a new replacement ballistic missile submarine slated to be in operation through 2080, all of which will lead to far greater expenditures if production follows;

WHEREAS, with the economic downturn forcing mayors and cities to make deep cuts in critical public services, and with more than 100 metropolitan areas projected to have double-digit unemployment by the end of this year, the budget deal worked out between the Administration and Congress contains a 16.2 percent reduction in Community Development Block Grant formula funding ? a $647 million cut for the current year, eliminates Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants, and includes huge reductions to other domestic programs of importance to mayors and cities, the size of which have not been seen in recent times;

WHEREAS, Mayors for Peace membership has grown to over 4,700 cities in 150 countries and regions, including half of the world's capital cities, with more than 170 U.S. members;

WHEREAS, the United States Conference of Mayors unanimously adopted resolutions in 2004, 2006 and each

year since, expressing its strong support for Mayors for Peace, its demand for negotiations for the global elimination of nuclear weapons by 2020, and its Cities Are Not Targets campaign;

WHEREAS, Mayors for Peace has been endorsed by national mayoral associations in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa;

WHEREAS, the final document of the 3rd Congress of United Cities and Local Governments, adopted in Mexico City November 20, 2010 expresses "our support for the call of the Mayors for Peace Campaign for a world free of nuclear weapons by 2020 through a new international Convention";

WHEREAS, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in Hiroshima for the 65th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing on August 6, 2010 expressed his strong support for the Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision Campaign for the global abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020, declaring, "The 2020 vision is a perfect vision"; and the United Nations, on March 24, 2011 recognized the importance of Mayors for Peace by inaugurating a permanent installation at its New York headquarters exhibiting more than 1 million signatures on the Mayors for Peace Cities Are Not Targets petition;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors reaffirms its call on President Obama to work with the leaders of the other nuclear weapon states to implement the United Nations Secretary-General's Five Point Proposal for Nuclear Disarmament forthwith, so that a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a related framework of mutually reinforcing legal instruments can be agreed upon and implemented by the year 2020, as urged by Mayors for Peace; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors calls on the U.S. Congress to terminate funding for modernization of the nuclear weapons complex and nuclear weapons systems, to slash spending on nuclear weapons programs well below Cold War levels, and to redirect those funds to meet the urgent needs of cities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors, in its contacts with national associations of local authorities of the other nuclear weapon states, calls upon them to also press their governments to enter into negotiations for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world and to sharply curtail expenditures on nuclear arms; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors expresses its continuing support for Mayors for Peace, pledges to assist in recruiting new U.S. members in order to help reach the goal of 5,000 member cities by the August 6, 2011 Hiroshima anniversary, at which time Mayors for Peace will represent one billion people; and, as since 2005, supports USCM representation at the international Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision Campaign Executive Committee and General Meetings later this year; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors agrees to take up this matter at its 80th Annual Meeting in June 2012, and that mayors shall remain engaged in this matter until our cities and citizens, and cities and citizens throughout the world, are no longer under the threat of nuclear annihilation and catastrophic climate change.

(See: www.usmayors.org)

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[1] http://www.johndear.org

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