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Letter to Obama: 'End Nuclear Weapons Era'

David Krieger | Dec. 8, 2008

Dear President-elect Obama:

Our economic security bubble has been decisively punctured, resulting in recession, massive losses of jobs and homes, destroyed dreams and ruined retirements. These are terrible losses, but they do not approach the severe consequences that would result from a punctured nuclear security bubble. We must move resolutely to assure that nuclear weapons will never be used again by accident or design.

One fact that is clear concerning nuclear weapons: They do not and cannot protect their possessors. They can be used to inflict monstrous death and destruction, in a first strike or in retaliation for a first-strike, but they cannot provide their possessors with security.

(Breaking News: Dec. 10, 2008: In a related matter, World Leaders today Launched an Effort to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Worldwide through negotiations.)[1]

In fact, the opposite is true. Nuclear weapons undermine the security of all nations and are the only weapon capable of destroying the United States. In a nuclear war, there would not be red states and blue states; there would be only a destroyed and debilitated nation. All of our vision, going back to our founders, and all of our dreams could be destroyed in a few moments or hours of unleashed nuclear violence. Even terrorist groups in possession of only a few nuclear weapons could potentially bring our country to its knees.

With nuclear weapons there is zero tolerance for accidents or miscalculations. For this reason, the only tolerable number of nuclear weapons on the planet is zero. But we can?t get to zero without US leadership.

Leading former US policymakers ? George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn ? have called for US leadership for nuclear weapons-free world and have proposed steps to move in this direction. Working to eliminate nuclear weapons is also the obligation of the United States under the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the promise we made in the year 2000 for an ?unequivocal undertaking? for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The US cannot achieve a world with zero nuclear weapons by itself, but it can lead the way with vision and action. President-elect Obama has made many important promises regarding nuclear disarmament, promises that the world has been waiting to hear from a US president. Now these promises must be put into action.

In his early days in office our newly elected leader must take steps to demonstrate his leadership for a world free of nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation has proposed a nuclear disarmament agenda for the new President during his first 100 days in office, composed of these three key steps:

1. Public Commitment: Make a major foreign policy address, affirming his commitment to initiate a global effort to achieve a world with zero nuclear weapons; to deemphasize reliance on nuclear weapons in US military

policy; to not develop new nuclear weapons; to not use nuclear weapons first under any circumstance; to seek Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; and to launch a major global initiative to assure control of all nuclear weapons and the material to construct them.

2. Bilateral Engagement: Open negotiations with Russia on a range of nuclear policy issues, including taking both sides? ballistic missiles off high alert status; extending the verification provisions of the 1991 Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START 1); and agreeing to the verifiable reduction to under 1,000 nuclear weapons each (deployed and reserve) by the end of 2010. To achieve these goals will likely require the US to retract its plans for deployment of missile defenses in Eastern Europe.

3. Global Action: Organize to convene a meeting of all nuclear weapons states prior to the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in order to initiate negotiations for a new treaty for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2020.

President-elect Obama has an unparalleled opportunity to reverse US nuclear policies that have made the use of nuclear weapons more likely, promoted nuclear weapons proliferation, and made America less secure. He must seize the moment and demonstrate US leadership for the rapid achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. If he does so now, the children of the world and their elders will owe him an immense debt of gratitude.

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[1] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7774584.stm