

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

MAGAZINE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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Solidarity and
Commitment
for Nuke
Abolition
- Hirotsugu
Terasaki



"The Time is
Right for the
Human Right
to Peace"
- Anwarul K.
Chowdhury

CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR FREE MIDDLE EAST A PRIORITY ISSUE

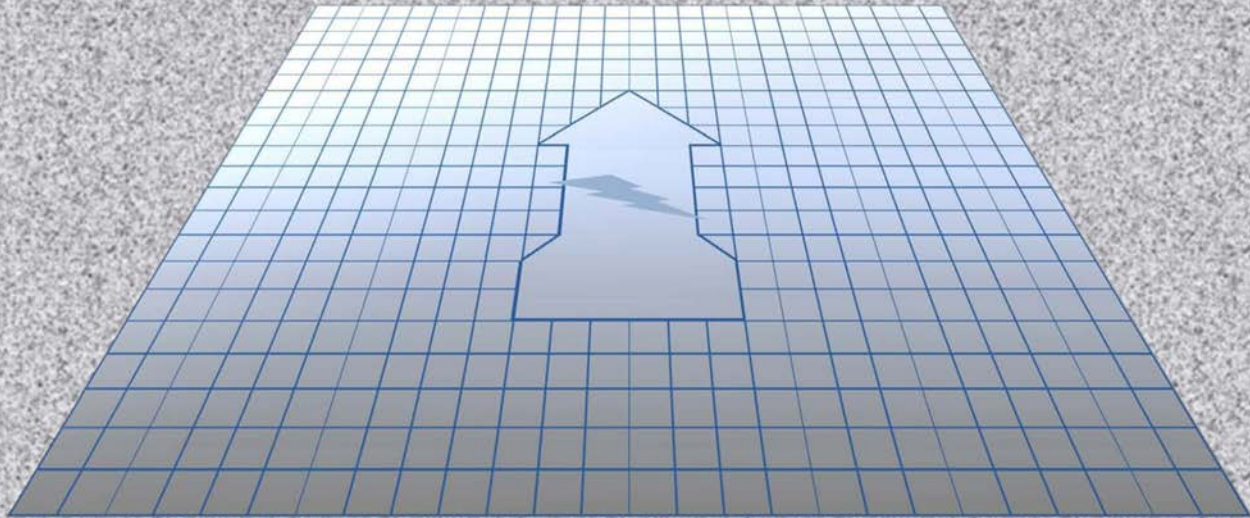


FOR UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT AL-NASSER

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No Peace, No Goodwill For Palestine

By Ernest Corea*



WASHINGTON DC - They came, they saw, they met. For the first time after a year of drift, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators met face-to-face in Amman, Jordan on January 3. The Palestinians presented the Israelis with written proposals for borders and security.

This brief encounter resulted from an initiative by the Government of Jordan and, after the meeting, Jordan's Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh announced that representatives of the two sides would meet again shortly. That meeting took place on January 7

Only days earlier, the core hope of "on earth peace, good will toward men" was repeatedly expressed at numerous Christmas events. Does that hope apply to Palestine?

So far, no. "True peace can be built only on justice," says Archbishop Desmond Tutu, commenting on the plight of Palestinians. What hopes of genuine peace, what expectations of goodwill, can be nurtured among those who survive in a particularly demeaning form of servitude?

A few days before 2011 ended, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the UN Security Council during a monthly briefing on the situation in the Middle

East that violent incidents had erupted "at a worrying rate" during the preceding month. As the year wound down, "the situation on the ground is deteriorating and the path towards peace (between Israel and Palestinians) remains dangerously uncertain."

Fernandez-Taranco noted the announcement by the Government of Israel of several new settlement constructions. He noted, too, the demolition of 57 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, an increase in (Israeli) settler violence, and over 300 Israeli military operations in the West Bank.

Gaza and southern Israel again witnessed "a dangerous deterioration" in the security situation, he reported. During the reporting period, 45 projectiles were fired from Gaza into Israel, while the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted nine incursions and 13 air strikes.

"We condemn in the strongest terms any indiscriminate firing of projectiles towards civilian areas and call on Israel to show maximum restraint," Fernandez-Taranco asserted.

Security Council Excluded

World reaction was not long in coming and figured, for instance, in the media briefing at the US State Department on December 21 with Press Spokesperson Victoria Nuland presiding. Excerpts follow.

QUESTION: Yesterday (December 20), the four members of the European Union on the Security Council issued a statement calling occupied territories and settlements in the occupied territories and East Jerusalem illegal under international law. Do you concur?

NULAND: . . . as you know, we declined to join that statement for all of the usual reasons. It doesn't change the fact that our longstanding policy remains that we don't recognize the legitimacy of the continued Israeli settlements, but we don't think statements in the UNSC are the way to pursue the goal of getting these parties back to the table. The best way to deal with this issue of land, settlement, et cetera, is for these parties to talk to each other, come up with borders, and then have two states living side by side in agreed borders.

QUESTION: Okay. Also, after the closed session, 14 members of the Security Council, one by one, criticized the position of the United States for not condemning the continued expansion of settlement. Do you have a response to that?

NULAND: We do not believe that this is business that needs to be done in the UN Security Council. We are absolutely clear with Israel where we stand on these issues. But shouting from the rooftops of the Security Council is not going to change the situation on the ground, which is that these parties have to get back to the table and settle these issues together, and that's the way we're going to have a lasting, stable peace.

Sauce for the Goose

QUESTION: And yet shouting from the rooftops from the Security Council on Syria is going to make a difference?

NULAND: Well, we've spoken about the concrete actions we want to see the Security Council take.

QUESTION: Well, you don't have a chance of getting them through if the Chinese and the Russians still aren't on board. So what's wrong with – why is it – what's good for the goose is not good for the gander here? . . . why does screaming and yelling at the Security Council on Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, North Korea – why does that – why is that all a good thing and yet . . . when it comes to Israel, it's absolutely not? ➔

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NULAND: Every situation is different. In this case, the answer to the problems in Israel with the Palestinian people can only be resolved when they sit down and talk to each other. They cannot be resolved in the Security Council. That's our longstanding view. . . ."

Separate from the report on illegal expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, and the eruption of asymmetrical violence, numerous references have been made in public discourse to the continued assault on the human rights of the Palestinians.

Concerns on this score were expressed both by civil society organisations such as Amnesty International and international multi-government bodies including the UN Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

UN Fully Engaged

And the UN has no place in bringing peace to this ravaged land? The record speaks for itself. The history of UN involvement in issues connected with Israel and Palestine challenges the view expressed by Nuland that " . . . the answer to the problems in Israel with the Palestinian people . . . cannot be resolved in the Security Council."

As the UN itself has pointed out: "the United Nations has been working on the question of Palestine since the first special session of the General Assembly on 28 April 1947, which established a body to investigate the issue and return with its recommendations. Over 60 years later, the range of the UN's work has continued to adapt to meet new challenges and address changing realities on the ground."

And, lest we forget, Israel's legitimacy as a state is derived from a UN Resolution, No. 181 (II) of Nov. 29, 1947.

Time, meanwhile, moves on. There is much happening in the Middle East that cannot be dismantled by ignorance in Washington DC.

The resurgence of Islam-based parties at elections is said to have encourage Hamas, for instance, to renew its contacts with the Palestinian Authority. On the Middle East's prolific gossip circuit, the name of a potential Prime Minister of a national unity government – Munib al-Masri – has been mentioned.

More contacts are expected early in 2012, and it would be a pity if these get derailed. Past experience points to opportunities lost.

Not Again

On January 12, 2009, the Nation Magazine published an interview with Lakhdar Brahimi, the elder statesman of Middle East diplomacy who told award-winning journalist Barbara Crossette:

"Hamas won an election, and what should have been done is immediately after the election is to go to them and tell them, congratulations: you have won and now you want to govern. We would like to help you govern. But for that there are conditions.

"But what was done was the entire international community--and, I'm sorry to say, some Arab countries--told Hamas, No, we don't want to talk to you. It's not impossible to go to Hamas and tell them, if you want to play an important part in the leadership

Photo above: UN | Paulo Filgueiras

of your people you've got to talk to others and listen to views other than yours. I'm almost certain that they would."

Let's hope that history does not repeat itself.

Old Invention

There is, meanwhile, an item of unfinished business to be dealt with: the claim by aspiring Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich that Palestinians are an "invented people" who are looking for an "invented state." Turns out he was wearing borrowed plumes when he spoke.

Here are the facts as set out by Uri Avnery, formerly a member of the Israeli Knesset and currently a writer and peace activist in Israel:

"The original Newton discovered the Law of Gravity. Newton Leroy Gingrich has discovered something no less earth-shaking: there is an "invented" people around, referring to the Palestinians.... a great discovery which, unfortunately, has been discovered by others long before.

"From its very beginning, the Zionist movement has denied the existence of the Palestinian people. It's an article of faith.

"The reason is obvious: if there exists a Palestinian people, then the country the Zionists were about to take over was not empty. Zionism would entail an injustice of historic proportions.

"Being very idealistic persons, the original Zionists found a way out of this moral dilemma: they simply denied its existence. The winning slogan was 'A land without a people for a people without a land.'

"So who were these curious human beings they met when they came to the country? Oh, ah, well, they were just people who happened to be there, but not 'a' people. Passers-by, so to speak.

"Later, the story goes, after we had made the desert bloom and turned an arid and neglected land into a paradise, Arabs from all over the region flocked to the country, and now they have the temerity – indeed the chutzpah – to claim that they constitute a Palestinian nation!

Consider This

"For many years after the founding of the State of Israel, this was the official line. Golda Meir famously exclaimed: 'There is no such thing as a Palestinian people!'"

"A huge propaganda machine – both in Israel and abroad – was employed to "prove" that there was no Palestinian people. . . . Until one day the State of Israel recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the "Palestinian people", and the argument was laid to rest.

"Until Newt came along and, like a later-day Jesus, raised it from the dead."

So now, consider this. However wrong and insulting the notion Gingrich touts might be, he can always engage in serial repentance and seek recourse to serial redemption. □



Conference on Nuke Free Middle East A Priority Issue

Exclusive Interview with UN General Assembly President Al-Nasser



NEW YORK - UN General Assembly (UNGA) President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser is committed to convening a conference directed at establishing a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East.

"I continue both personally and through my office to lend all possible support to formal and informal efforts and events dedicated to a timely convening of the 2012 conference. These efforts will continue," Al-Nasser told Global Perspectives in a wide-ranging, exclusive question-and-answer interview.

The conference, he pointed out, is a key interest of the 193-member world body which has on numerous occasions endorsed the importance of keeping the Middle East free of nuclear weapons, "in the context of promoting international peace."

Other highlights from UNGA activities covered in the interview included the Arab Awakening, Palestinian membership of the UN, the Millennium Development Goals, South-South cooperation and aid effectiveness.

Al-Nasser who is from Qatar assumed the UNGA presidency on June 22, 2011 after a rich and varied diplomatic career. He was Qatar's permanent representative (ambassador) to the UN from 1988 to 2011. During that period, he was president of the UNGA high level committee on South-South cooperation, and chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

The UNGA President's commitment to pursuing the nuclear-weapons-free zone conference falls within the four priority areas he has selected for emphasis during his term in office: mediation and the peaceful settlement of disputes, UN reform and revitalization,

improving disaster preparedness and response, and sustainable development and global prosperity.

In other comments related to the Middle East he said that the international community has "a moral and practical duty" to support the Arab Awakening.

Full text of the interview follows.

Question: What would you describe as the highlights of your term as president of the UN General Assembly until now?

Al-Nasser: Since I took over the Presidency, it has been a very busy period not only for the United Nations but also the international community as a whole, with the UN General Assembly getting increasingly vocal on issues of democracy and human rights. This is particularly relevant in the context of the countries experiencing the Arab Awakening. The Assembly has been active in encouraging the necessary global partnership to assist the governments and people in the Arab World to benefit from this Arab Awakening.

I have enjoyed very close collaboration with the UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon. We had two important joint visits to Libya and Somalia to show the UN working as one to help address the challenges facing millions of people, especially women and children, in these two countries. In the context of Libya, I effectively used my authority and leadership as President of the General Assembly to restore the legitimacy of the Libyan people's representation at the UN by inviting the Transitional National Council to take the Libyan seat in the General Assembly.

Another significant moment has been to preside over the General Assembly's General Debate in September when we all watched Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas articulate Palestine's case for recognition as a Member State of the UN and submitted its application amidst thunderous applause. This is undoubtedly a high point of my Presidency.

During my Presidency of the GA so far, the GA has adopted a much-welcomed resolution on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. Its particular importance lies in the fact that these diseases are now the biggest cause of death worldwide, with millions of people in the developing countries being the victims. But many of these deaths are preventable and this resolution is aimed at addressing this unacceptable situation.

I also travelled to Finland, Switzerland, Japan, and Korea in the context of various dimensions of the work of the General Assembly, especially those related to the four key themes I have chosen for the on-going session of the General Assembly, namely, Mediation and the peaceful settlement of disputes; UN reform and revitalization; Improving disaster preparedness and response and Sustainable development and global prosperity. ➡



UNGA President (centre) with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) during joint mission to Somalia | Credit: UN

There is still much more work to be done in the remaining eight months of this session. The complexity of the multilateral process, political sensitivity of the member-states, big or small and the elaborate maze of responsibility that the President has to undertake in steering smoothly the work of the world's most universal and highest-level forum is difficult to outline in an interview like this.

Question: Do you expect the Arab Spring to profoundly impact the work of the UN in general and of the General Assembly in particular?

Al-Nasser: I would describe the events that are unfolding in the Arab world as the Arab Awakening rather than the Arab Spring as that is much better forward-looking description of what has happened and is ongoing. I believe that the Arab world is going through a very significant moment in the history of the Middle East, perhaps more significant than the decolonization era. At this point, the international community has a moral and practical duty to support the call for equality, social justice and a better future coming out of the Arab world. But it is essential to point out that the democratic transformation should be accompanied by an economic and social transformation that is home-grown and that asserts national ownership. The UN has a central role in building consensus and galvanizing collective political will in favour of this transformational process. The UN can provide capacity development opportunities to these countries. In fact, the UN has dispatched its experts to Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in exploratory missions to assess the areas where UN assistance is needed and could be provided upon request of these countries. Anyone who has been following last September's General Debate at the UN would have realized that the majority of world leaders were supportive of this on-going wave of freedom and democracy in the Arab world.

Question: Are there any realistic prospects of Palestine becoming a full member of the UN in the near future – by 2014, for example, 40 years after PLO was given an observer status at the UN?

Al-Nasser: I cannot see any reason why this shouldn't be the case. The Palestinian people have the right to pursue or seek the membership of any international body including that of the General Assembly as sovereign peace-loving state. We have all witnessed the very supportive response that Member States and delegations gave to the speech by President Abbas on Palestine's application for full UN membership. ☺



UNGA President at a press conference with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon | Credit: UN

As you may well know, already many countries have recognized the state of Palestine. A Security Council Committee has submitted its report to the Council on this matter. The Palestinians have not announced their plans yet about the next course of action that they would prefer. If the Palestinians take their bid to the General Assembly seeking a permanent observer status as a state, then just a simple majority of those present and voting (out of the total UN membership of 193) is required. Let us see what the Palestinian leadership decides.

Question: The UN Millennium Development Goals envisage eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. But on all accounts very little has been achieved by now to fulfil that ambitious goal. On top of it, according to a UN report, the US-EU financial crisis is threatening to spill over to developing countries. Is there anything the GA can do, has done and plans to do to avert things getting from bad to worse?

Al-Nasser: The Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs) are very practical benchmarks in measuring progress of the global development cooperation, as identified by the United Nations. It was under the auspices of the General Assembly that world leaders gathered in New York in September 2000 and agreed on these very important landmark goals. A lot of work has gone into the achievement of the MDGs and a number of countries have done well in making progress with regard to one or more goals. I am, of course, aware that a lot more needs to be done by all of us if we are to achieve these goals.

I would urge all Member States to double and intensify their efforts as the 2015 deadline approaches fast. Despite the worldwide economic and financial downturn, I believe it is in our best collective interest to do our best for the achievement of the MDGs.

In all my meetings with world leaders, ministers and other high officials I continue to urge them to do more for “Sustainable Development and Global Prosperity” which is one the four areas of special focus of my Presidency. This is why the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June in Brazil is very important. It can surely give an extra push to efforts towards the achievement of the MDGs and take the UN’s development agenda forward. ➔

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Question: You are known to be a champion of South-South cooperation. Is there any prospect of such cooperation preventing an MDG fiasco, influencing public opinion and impacting life on the ground as North-South development cooperation has done all these years?

AI-Nasser: Yes, I have been personally deeply interested and involved in issues pertaining to South-South and Triangular Cooperation. In fact, I have had the honour of serving as the Chairman of the UN General Assembly's High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation, until the successful outcome of the High-Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation in Nairobi in 2009.

I have a strong conviction that South-South cooperation has the real potential of tackling the development challenges of our time and triggering sustainable development in the developing world.

As I have underlined many times, I would also like to emphasize again that South-South cooperation does not replace North-South cooperation. They complement each other.

South-South and Triangular cooperation are more relevant today than ever before, especially when you consider the economic successes of some key countries in the South as well as some of the successful innovative solutions that are being shared, replicated and scaled-up among nations of the global South.

Question: Have any new signals emerged for South-South cooperation from the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan?

AI-Nasser: I welcome the Busan Outcome Document adopted by ministers and high-level officials of developed and developing nations including emerging economies as well as civil society organizations. It is important that the document pledged to "establish a new, inclusive and representative global partnership for effective development co-operation". We should always recognize that development aid becomes effective when it engages communities, civil society, the private sector and government, to collaborate and seek synergies based on national development priorities and framework.

It is encouraging that the Busan Forum agreed to "broaden support for South-South and triangular cooperation, helping to tailor these horizontal partnerships to a greater diversity of country contexts and needs." It is good that the international community agreed to make "fuller use of South-South and triangular cooperation, recognizing the success of these approaches to date and the synergies they offer".

Question: What role do you think the GA could possibly play in ensuring that the conference on a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East takes place this year as scheduled and that it brings forth positive results?

AI-Nasser: The General Assembly has identified nuclear disarmament as one of its top priorities since 1978, at its First Special Session on Disarmament. A good number of resolutions presented to the Assembly for endorsement include clear cut

references to the importance of the goal to establish a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East in the context of promoting international peace and security.

This year, in addition to the adoption of its annual consensus resolution entitled "Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East", the General Assembly adopted another resolution, entitled "The Risk of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East", where specific reference has been made to the 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Zone Free from Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East and where the Conference has been strongly endorsed.

On various occasions, including through my statement before the First Committee of the General Assembly, I welcomed the appointment by the UN Secretary-General of a Facilitator from Finland, Mr. Jaakko Laajava. I have offered the support of the General Assembly as a whole to facilitate his task in convening of a successful conference this year, in line with the consensus outcome document of the 2010 Review Conference of States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

To demonstrate the importance of this issue on my agenda, I dispatched a senior representative from my office to participate, as an observer, at the Forum convened in November 2011 by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Relevant Experiences of Other Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones to the establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. I continue, both personally and through my office, to lend all possible support to formal and informal efforts and events dedicated to a timely convening of the 2012 Conference. These efforts will continue.

Question: The GA has been labouring hard for years for reform of the UN Security Council as much-needed re-calibration in response to geopolitical transformation. Do you see any prospects of such a reform by 2015, 70 years after the founding of the UN?

AI-Nasser: I believe reform of the Security Council lies at the heart of revitalizing decision-making on international peace and security by the United Nations. This is one of the four priority areas I have chosen for my Presidency. The first meeting of the 8th round of intergovernmental negotiations took place last November, chaired by Afghan Ambassador Zahir Tanin, in whose leadership I have full confidence. I believe these negotiations are sending a clear message to the Member States about the need for achieving this long-overdue reform. As President of the General Assembly, I stay committed to a solution that reflects the collective will of all Member States. There was a new dynamic during the negotiations so I intend to capitalize on that by hosting a retreat on Security Council Reform in the coming few weeks. □



UN General Assembly's Notable Achievements

By Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

[Following write-up consists of the excerpts from General Assembly President Al-Nasser's remarks on the occasion of the closing of the main part of the 66th session on 23 December 2011 in New York. Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar was elected President of the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 22 June 2011 through the unanimous support of the 193 member-states of the United Nations and formally assumed his office on 13 September when the Assembly's 66th session was convened. – Editor]

I began this session in September by saying that the world is facing unprecedented challenges: environmental, economic, social and political. Peoples' demands around the world for good governance and prosperity are stronger and louder than ever before.

I also remarked that our actions today will define our place in this decisive moment in history. I called upon each of you to work together to build a truly united global partnership, so that we can move forward the Assembly's agenda this year.

I firmly believe that you rose to this challenge. The Assembly acted in concert on many of the major issues of our time and so far adopted around 300 resolutions and decisions in total.

On **Libya**, the Assembly restored the legitimate representation of the Libyan people to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Accordingly, the international community is now responding to the aspirations of a new, free Libya. As you are aware, I myself made a joint visit to Libya with the Secretary-General on 2 November, to demonstrate the UN's strong support for the Libyans, as they embark on this critical journey of reconciliation, democracy and reconstruction.

On **Syria**, the General Assembly expressed its concern regarding the ongoing developments in the country. On 19 December, the Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the continued grave and systematic human rights violations committed by the Syrian authorities, and calling upon them to implement the League of Arab States' Plan of Action in its entirety. To keep the whole membership informed, I immediately transmitted the report of the independent international commission of inquiry from the President of the Human Rights Council, as well as the report of the Human Rights Council on its special session of 2 December. I hope that the killing and violence in Syria will immediately come to an end, in keeping with the calls of the international community.

The issue of **Palestine** has been particularly central this General Assembly session. We witnessed an historic development here in New York when the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, transmitted Palestine's application for Membership to the United Nations to the Secretary-General on 23 September.

On 29 November, many Member States and I reaffirmed our solidarity with the Palestinian people. A number of important resolutions on Palestine were examined by several Committees and adopted once again this year. It is my conviction that the General Assembly should continue to work collectively for the attainment of a just and comprehensive negotiated peace settlement in the Middle East.

I would also note here that the Israeli construction of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Occupied

Syrian Golan, is of particular concern. I would urge the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, as it contravenes international law and the Roadmap.

'Peaceful settlement of disputes'

In keeping with the four pillars I outlined for our focus this session, enormous efforts have been made and progress is still underway. I would like to highlight some particularly notable achievements.

The first pillar, 'The peaceful settlement of disputes', reflects my firm belief in the role of mediation to resolve conflicts. Encouraged by the growing need for mediation, I suggested the theme for the General Debate: "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes". I am thankful to world leaders for elaborating on this matter by sharing their perspectives and experiences, as well as by making specific suggestions.

To assist with moving this issue forward, on 9 November I organized a fruitful dialogue on "United Nations Mediation: Experiences and Reflections from the Field". I invite all Member States and partners to consider the summary from this event, and to benefit from the valuable lessons shared. This event was a first step, with others to follow.

In a related context, I addressed the Fourth Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations on 11 December, reiterating the need for youth participation in efforts to advance cross-cultural understanding and sustainable development. As a follow-up to the Doha forum, I will organise in March 2012 an interactive debate on fostering cross-cultural understanding for building peaceful and inclusive societies. Special attention will be given to the role of youth.

Reaffirming its commitment to follow-up on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution emphasising the need for their full and effective implementation. I call upon governments, the Secretary-General and civil society to actively implement this important Declaration and Programme of Action, thereby demonstrating commitment to the promotion of tolerance and non-violence.

UN reform and revitalization

Related to my second pillar, 'UN reform and revitalization', the formal debate on revitalizing the work of the General Assembly was held on 1 December. Here, the Membership reflected its desire for and commitment to a strengthened, responsive, more efficient and effective General Assembly. ➔

On the question of the equitable representation on, and increase in, the Membership of the Security Council and related matters, Member States considered this issue on 8 November. On 14 November, I addressed a Security Council reform workshop in Tokyo. This workshop was followed on 28 November by the first meeting in the eighth round of the Inter Governmental Negotiations, conducted under my auspices. I encourage Member States to continue to actively participate in these negotiations. This, I hope, will help pave the way forward, based on the collective will of the Member States. In continuing my attention to this subject, I am organizing a retreat on Security Council reform, scheduled for early next year, intended to consolidate as much as possible the various positions on this important issue.

Improving humanitarian prevention and response

Under my third pillar, 'Improving humanitarian prevention and response', there is no doubt that a consolidation of efforts is required to address more frequent and intense natural disasters, such as we have recently seen in, for example, Haiti, Pakistan, Japan, Turkey, Thailand, and just this past weekend in the Philippines. In this respect, I plan to organize a thematic debate on disaster prevention and response in the Spring of 2012.

The devastating situation in Somalia is of course at the fore of our minds and hearts. Urgent support is needed in Somalia, to protect starving populations who are facing indescribable humanitarian disaster. As you are aware, I undertook a joint visit to Somalia with the Secretary-General on 9 December. The visit reaffirmed that the UN and the international community stand behind the people of Somalia in the tremendous challenges they face. I re-iterated in my meeting with Somali government officials that the implementation of the Roadmap adopted last September is the way forward.

Sustainable development and global prosperity

Great strides have been made under my fourth pillar 'Sustainable development and global prosperity'. Last September, the first-ever high-level meeting on desertification was held. It was followed in October by the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in the Republic of Korea, which I addressed and presented the high-level meeting summary. At both events, world leaders stressed that desertification is not only harming people but it is harming our development and our future, and that addressing desertification is an issue of high priority.

In the lead up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio next June, much work has been done by the Second Committee and the Preparatory Committee for Rio plus 20. On 17-18 December, I convened a retreat on "Paving the way for a successful Rio plus 20", to encourage broader agreement on the Conference's outcome.

We have also had a number of meetings and briefings on sustainable development. In Durban, Member States agreed to work towards a new global treaty. Member States also participated in the second dialogue between the General Assembly and the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability; the

briefing on Sustainable Energy for All; and an informal interactive briefing in preparation for consideration of the Secretary-General's annual Report on accelerating progress towards the MDGs post-2015.

Turning to macroeconomic issues, given the General Assembly's preeminence as the legitimate centre of global decision-making, I convened pre- and post-G20 Summit briefings. Here, I encouraged all major groups to cooperate in addressing the challenges of the international economic and financial system. The Assembly also held its Fifth High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development.

At the Global South-South Development Expo in Rome, I reiterated my conviction that South-South and triangular cooperation, backed by adequate funding, are key tools for tackling the development challenges of our time.

Nuclear disarmament

In addition to work under these four pillars, significant progress was also made in other areas as well. To mention but a few:

Disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament, remains high on this session's Agenda. Revitalization of the disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, remains one of the key requirements to advance this goal. This session, First Committee delegations had a very intensive and constructive exchange on these topics. Accordingly, I intend to visit and address the Conference on Disarmament in January, with a strong supportive message promoting positive action aimed at revitalizing the Conference.

Other important issues

The political will expressed at the High-level Meeting on the **Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases** in September was a major breakthrough by the international community in protecting the world's most vulnerable populations. I call on all partners to work closely with the World Health Organization to ensure the implementation of the political declaration, and I stand ready to support you in anyway that I can.

At the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the political declaration, adopted by consensus, reaffirmed our collective commitment to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

By adopting resolution 66/10, we welcomed the recent establishment of the **United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center at UN Headquarters**. I encourage all Member States to collaborate with the Center in contributing to the implementation of its activities in support of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

And we marked an historic milestone in human development: we are now 7 billion people strong.

Also this session, in the context of the **Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers** on 5 December, we celebrated the contribution of millions of men and women who selflessly dedicate their time, knowledge and energy in supporting UN goals and promoting a better world. ➔ on page 13

"The Time is Right for the Human Right to Peace"

By Anwarul K. Chowdhury*



No time is more appropriate than now to build the culture of peace. No social responsibility is greater nor task more significant than that of securing peace on our planet on a sustainable foundation. Today's world with its complexities and challenges is becoming increasingly more interdependent and interconnected. The sheer magnitude of these requires all of us to work together. Recognition of the human right to peace by the international community, particularly the United Nations, will surely generate the inspiration in creating the much-needed culture of peace in each one of us.

NEW YORK - Nearly thirteen years ago in 1998, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, a group of civil society organizations launched a global campaign for the recognition by all of the human right to peace. They declared, "We are convinced that after this century with its horrible wars, barbarism and crimes against humanity and human rights, it is high time for the 'Human Right to Peace'".

They elaborated by underscoring that "the right to live is not applied in times of war – this contradiction and the undermining of the universality of human rights must be ended by the recognition of the human right to peace". They called upon all "to prevent violence, intolerance and injustice in our countries and societies in order to overcome the

cult of war and to build a Culture of Peace".

Both objectives still remain elusive, unattained – human right to peace has not yet been fully, formally and directly recognized as well as efforts needed for advancing the culture of peace remain sidelined in the UN system.

The international community over the years has been endeavoring to establish the universality of peace and human rights. The United Nations, in its Charter, recognized peace as central to its existence and affirmed that it is both a prerequisite and a consequence of the full enjoyment of human rights by all.

The collective dimension of the human right to peace was codified in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, as the responsibility to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war lies with the peoples.

The collective right of peoples to peace and security was also proclaimed by Article 23.1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981. Also, in 1984, the UN General Assembly proclaimed that "the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace"; and declared that "the preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State".

With regards to peace, the 1999 Conference of The Hague Appeal for Peace is worthy of mention, because it approved an ambitious political document entitled "Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century". The Agenda comprised four main appeals on disarmament and human security; prevention, resolution and transformation of violent conflicts; international humanitarian and human rights law and institutions; and the root causes of war/the culture of peace.

Since then civil society has assumed that peace, justice, development, disarmament and the respect for human rights are essential elements to build the culture of peace to challenge our current culture of violence.

Pioneering steps in this context were taken with the Istanbul Declaration, adopted in 1969 by the XXI International Red Cross Conference, which states that human beings have the right to enjoy lasting peace as well as with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights resolution in 1976, which affirms that everyone has the right to live in conditions of peace and international security. ☺

**Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury is former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations and at present, the Senior Special Advisor to the President of the UN General Assembly. This Viewpoint is adapted from the speech Ambassador Chowdhury made on 25 September 2011 at the Platform Meeting at the New York Society for Ethical Culture.*

Luarca Declaration

I am very proud to say that the civil society organizations have been the most forward-looking advocating for the recognition of human right to peace. The leadership role in this campaign has been played by the Spanish Society for International Human Rights Law (SSIHRL). They adopted a landmark document in October 2006 titled the "Luarca Declaration on the Human Right to Peace" that articulates a very forceful and comprehensive expose of the subject and hopes that it would be considered by the United Nations General Assembly "in the near future." Five years have passed in between.

A very valuable aspect of the Luarca Declaration is that it crafts all the various "elements of human right to peace" bringing together, in an effective manner, the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and the overriding need to achieve international social justice. It also affirmed very boldly and rightly that the effectiveness of the right to peace will not be achieved without the realisation of equal rights for men and women.

The recognition of "enabling" human rights, such as peace and development, is required to achieve a coordinated response on a worldwide scale to those threats to human rights arising from the global interdependence of all peoples and nations. Indeed, the prevailing condition of extreme poverty, hunger and disease in the world mean not only a clear violation of fundamental human rights, but also a real threat to millions of human beings.

The Luarca Declaration was further elaborated in the Bilbao Declaration that was subsequently reviewed by the International Drafting Committee – ten experts from five regions of the world – meeting in Barcelona which adopted on 2 June 2010 the Barcelona Declaration on the Human Right to Peace, thus providing international acknowledgment to the private codification process initiated in Luarca in 2006. I had the honor and pleasure of being the Chairman of that International Committee. The Barcelona Declaration got endorsed by the broad-based International Congress held in Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Since 2007 the Human Rights Council is reaffirming the fundamental value of solidarity in global relations. The Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations in 2000 affirmed that "global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes costs and burdens fairly, in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice, and that those who suffer, or who benefit least, deserve help from those who benefit most".

In the international community, there was also increasing recognition of what is being called ad the third generation of human rights closely linked to the fundamental value of solidarity – first generation being political and civil rights and the second being the economic, social and cultural rights. Nearly 1800 civil society organizations joined together to form in Geneva an alliance in support of the recognition of the human right to peace by the Council and ultimately by the UN General assembly.

Human right to peace

Addressing the arguments raised by the detractors of the proposal in relation to the allegedly vague content of the human right to peace, Canadian peace exponent Douglas Roche underscores that the human right to peace "is the product of a paradigm shift at the international level. Rights that focus solely on the relationship between the State and the individual are not sufficient in responding to a globalized world in which problems are no longer defined purely in national terms. The same global circuitry that fuels transportation, information, finance and organization has also increased the power of the arms trader, the warlord, the religious fanatic, the deranged political leader, the human trafficker and the terrorist. There is, thus, a technological burden with which the other two generations of human rights were never designed to cope, and the human right to peace is an attempt to respond to the perils of the modern interconnected world. Dismissing the human right to peace as vague and declaring that it offers nothing new is an exercise that misses the mark. The human right to peace is innovative and addresses a whole swathe of new and interconnected global challenges". ☞

UN General Assembly's Notable Achievements

[Continued from page 11]

The United Nations family has suffered tragic losses in the recent past. During our memorial service on 21 November, we gathered at Headquarters to pay tribute and honor the memory of 197 brave and beloved friends and colleagues. I underscore again that the safety and security of UN personnel, civilian and uniformed, must be a top priority for us all.

As I've said since the outset, I believe strongly in the value of partnership. In keeping with my commitment to expand and strengthen our global partnership, I held in October an interactive dialogue and lively discussion with members of civil society and the private sector.

Going forward, a lot of work remains to be done. I will soon communicate directly to the Missions the informal activities I intend to organize in 2012. I will also work closely with Member States in preparation of the high-level meetings in the 67th session, including the high-level event on the rule of law, and any other events that may arise.

In carrying out these endeavors, I look forward to working with each of you and to making even greater strides next year.

As members of the chief deliberative and policymaking organ of the United Nations – not to mention the most representative and universal body in the world, and the birthplace of international law - it is our shared responsibility to make peace and prosperity a reality for all. [Source: Website of the UNGA President at UN General Assembly

<http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/66/statements/closingsession231211.shtml>] ☐

Although international law and politics acknowledge the prevailing interrelationship between human rights and peace, the recognition of the right to peace as an autonomous human right has not yet been achieved by the UN General Assembly. Nevertheless, I and like me many believe that the right to peace should be qualified as a right of solidarity.

The international solidarity requires international cooperation, union of interest and joint action in order to preserve not only the fabric and very survival of international society, but also to achieve the collective goals. All means used to achieve this global purpose are shared by the right to peace, because the "cooperation for the maintenance of international peace and security is an absolute necessity for the implementation of this right". Once the right to peace is established as a new human right, it would provide a solid basis to the culture of peace. Its recognition would also give fresh impetus to the struggle against violence and attitudes based on force, imposition and gender discrimination.

Culture of peace

Recalling Einstein's comment that "Peace cannot be kept by force ... it can only be achieved by understanding", my dear friend and colleague Federico Mayor, who has been a visionary leader of UNESCO, said, "we must understand today that if peace is the right of all people, then a culture of peace is the responsibility of all people". So profound and so appropriate!!

Promotion of peace needs to be understood not only in the passive sense of the absence of war, but also in the positive sense of creation of conditions of equity, gender and racial equality and social justice. Indeed, depriving people of their economic, social and cultural rights generates social injustice, marginalization and unrestrained exploitation. It follows that there exists a correlation between socio-economic inequalities and violence.

Thus, the realization of the right to development is vital to reduce any kind of internal or external violence within society. It is therefore necessary to reincorporate into the international agenda the issue of the right to peace, which had disappeared since the end of the Cold War. The United Nations should re-engage in the real sense in favour of solidarity, human rights, international cooperation, disarmament and peace as a whole.

As we step into the second decade of the 21st century, we could surely take lessons from our past in order to build a new and better tomorrow. One lesson learned is that to prevent history repeating itself – the values of non-violence, tolerance and democracy will have to be inculcated in every woman and man – children and adults alike. As former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace laureate Kofi Annan has said, "Over the years we have come to realize that it is not enough to send peacekeeping forces to separate warring parties. It is not enough to engage in peace-building efforts after societies have been ravaged by conflict. It is not enough to conduct preventive diplomacy. All of this is essential work, but we want enduring results. We need, in short, a culture of peace."

With that objective, a landmark decision was taken by the United Nations to adopt the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace in 1999. I had the honor of chairing the nine-month long negotiations for reaching consensus on this norm-setting document.

Peace is a prerequisite for human development. And peace cannot be achieved unless the mind is at peace. Peace is meaningful only when we have peace within and peace outside.

We should never forget the profound words incorporated in the UNESCO Constitution that "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." The flourishing of culture of peace will generate the mindset that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

No time is more appropriate than now to build the culture of peace. No social responsibility is greater nor task more significant than that of securing peace on our planet on a sustainable foundation. Today's world with its complexities and challenges is becoming increasingly more interdependent and interconnected. The sheer magnitude of these requires all of us to work together. Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. For that, we have to build a grand alliance for the culture of peace amongst all, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of the communities.

In today's world, more so, the culture of peace should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity.

Seed of peace exists in all of us. It must be nurtured, cared for and promoted by us all to flourish. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be realized from within.

A key ingredient in building the culture of peace is education. Peace education needs to be accepted in all parts of the world, in all societies and countries as an essential element in creating culture of peace. The young of today deserves a radically different education – "one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, non-violence and global cooperation." They need the skills and knowledge to create and nurture peace for their individual selves as well as for the world they belong to.

All educational institutions need to offer opportunities that prepare the students to be responsible and productive citizens of the world and should introduce the teaching that builds the culture of peace.

We should not also be oblivious that non-violence can truly flourish when the world is free of poverty, hunger, discrimination, exclusion, intolerance and hatred – and when women and men can realize their highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life.

Here let me underline a point very strongly that much of the dynamic progress towards culture of peace derives inspiration and hope from visions and actions of women who constitute half of the world population. Promotion of equality between women and men and equal participation of women in all decision-making are essential prerequisites to attaining sustainable peace.

As has been said, "For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls." I believe with all my conviction that when women are marginalized and their equality is not established in all spheres of human activity, neither the human right to peace is worthwhile, nor the culture of peace is possible. □



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President of the 66th Session



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The Cabinet of the President of the 66th session of the General Assembly of the UN.

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All members of the United Nations are represented in the General Assembly. Each nation, rich or poor, large or small, has one vote.

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Solidarity and Commitment for Nuke Abolition

By Hirotsugu Terasaki*



*Hirotsugu Terasaki is Executive Director of the Office of Peace Affairs of Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

TOKYO - On November 26 last year, a resolution calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons was successfully adopted at the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This landmark development proved highly encouraging for civil society organizations working for the abolition of nuclear weapons. As one such organization, we (Soka Gakkai International) would also like to express our heartfelt respect and acclaim for the adopted resolution.

It is widely recognized that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has made important efforts toward the abolition of nuclear weapons since the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. Statements made in April 2010 by Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and at the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates held in Hiroshima in November 2010 by Tadateru Konoé, President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, were expressions of that enduring commitment.

Such engagement on the part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – historical leaders in the field of humanitarian relief – as well as civil society organizations whose prime focus is, for example, human rights and sustainable development, demonstrate the expanding global constituencies for a world without nuclear weapons.

Interstate negotiations face the inherent limitations that arise from the fact that governments are charged, first and foremost, with representing their perceived national interests. In an increasingly interdependent world, however, we are impelled to look beyond national interests, and bring shared, global interests to the fore.

At the same time, the continuing impacts of poverty, unemployment and disease require that we look at the realities of individuals' lives within states and address the imperatives of "human security" – creating and maintaining the conditions in which people can fully enjoy their right to a life of dignity.

In parallel with the need to develop more diverse perspectives and maximize their respective advantages, there is a growing need to foster solidarity across the boundaries that have sometimes separated people working in different fields – such as nuclear abolition, humanitarian protection and relief, human rights, sustainable development and so on. Only by realizing how deeply linked these concerns are will it be possible to build the kind of global popular solidarity needed to make meaningful progress toward our respective policy objectives.

As a network of Buddhist lay believers, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has continued to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons for more than 50 years. At the heart of Buddhist teachings is the concept of "dependent origination," which holds that all things exist with and because of their relationships with other beings and phenomena. The real-life application of this concept takes the form of the simple injunction that we cannot, and must not, attempt to establish our own happiness at the expense of others' suffering.

This has led us to denounce nuclear weapons – which are explicitly designed to annihilate others with overwhelmingly destructive power – as an absolute evil. Because they give voice to clear moral imperatives rooted in the lived experience of people's lives, faith-based organizations (FBOs) such as SGI can make a unique contribution to expanding the participatory horizons of the antinuclear movement. ➡



www.sgi.org

A Threat to Democratic Governance

After the first nuclear weapons were used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the immensity of their destructive force led to their being considered "the ultimate weapon." As the Cold War continued, and both sides expanded their arsenals, the staggering and inhumane effects of nuclear weapons acted as constraints against their use in hostilities. The nuclear arms race, however, continued unabated as nuclear weapons came to be seen as having a principally deterrent value. They had become weapons whose use was unthinkable, but whose development and maintenance could deter attack and serve as a diplomatic bargaining chip.

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a distinct change in the role of nuclear weapons. With the proliferation of nuclear technology, there is a renewed possibility of their use – in particular by terrorist organizations against whom the logic of deterrence is meaningless. The logic of nuclear deterrence – which rests on the "balance of terror" – is incapable of deterring people possessed by a nihilistic disregard for human life. The indiscriminate nature of contemporary terrorism makes every person on Earth a potential target, and the realities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand as grim reminders of the devastating atrocity that could be visited on us.

It is crucial that awareness of these new realities be shared throughout civil society. Individuals must understand that, under this new reality, we are all potential targets and that our only path to safety lies in ensuring that no nuclear weapon is ever used anywhere. Continuing to share this awareness and foster international public opinion against nuclear weapons is critical to the future of democratic governance.

This is because nuclear weapons are fundamentally antithetical to the values – human rights and dignity, concern for the welfare of others, sustainability – that are recognized as essential to the human future. Confronting and correcting the deep structural distortions that arise from the attempt to maintain national security through the possession of nuclear weapons must be a key element of efforts to realize these values.

Based on this awareness, SGI launched the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition campaign in 2007. As one element of this campaign, we are currently working with OPANAL – the intergovernmental agency that oversees implementation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco that established a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in Latin America and the Caribbean – to hold an international conference on the future of NWFZs. It is hoped that this conference, scheduled for February as a follow up to a forum organized by the IAEA last November, will help lay the groundwork for holding a conference this year on creating a NWFZ in the Middle East.

In like manner, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has urged the holding of a nuclear abolition summit in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2015 with the purpose of marking the effective end of the nuclear era. Toward these and other related objectives, SGI is ready to work with concerned civil society organizations, governments and intergovernmental bodies.

We are also committed to helping the normative consciousness already shared among the world's people against the atrocities of nuclear weapons use to find explicit and binding form. The first steps must be the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the early start of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention banning these weapons forever. In that sense, we welcome and applaud the decision made by the Indonesian Parliament in December last year to authorize the ratification of the CTBT as this provides further impetus for the Treaty's entry into force.

Transitioning to Human Security

The time for debating whether it will be possible to rid the world of nuclear weapons is long past. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and other prominent leaders in U.S. security affairs – all of whom have supported the doctrine of nuclear deterrence – are now on record with the view that, in order to prevent nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation, we must aim for a world free of nuclear weapons.

What can the world's people do, based on a clear recognition of the threat of nuclear weapons, to avert and resolve this crisis before it is too late? The time has come to give clear expression to the popular will for a world without nuclear weapons. Global civil society can and must play a central role giving voice and form to the desire for change.

SGI President Ikeda has written that, "In order to achieve real security in the twenty-first century we need to bring forth the powers of imagination that will enable us to directly and accurately apprehend evolving realities, to guide these changes toward the desired direction and to give birth to entirely new realities. To effect the transition from military-based national security to a new paradigm of human security requires a new creativity based on such powers of imagination."

In this context, the fact that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has now announced a resolution clearly indicating that it is strengthening its efforts toward the abolition of nuclear weapons is a clear light of hope for the civil society organizations that are working tirelessly to give birth to a new reality. □

The Long Slow March to Nuclear Weapons Free World

By Jamshed Baruah



BERLIN - "We want a nuclear weapons free world." More than 80 percent of people around the globe have expressed this overwhelming desire to authors of a new report. But a close look shows that very little is happening rather slowly in terms of reducing nukes and putting a halt to proliferation. This is cause of profound concern also to atomic scientists.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) released a study on January 16, which says that every country in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa is in favour of a treaty banning nuclear weapons, as are most nations in Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East. But in Europe and North America, particularly among members of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) nuclear alliance, support for a ban on nukes is weakest.

ICAN's report, titled 'Towards a Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons', comes one week after the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists was moved one minute closer to midnight in response to growing nuclear dangers around the world and a lack of progress towards nuclear abolition. The last time the Doomsday Clock minute hand moved was in January 2010, when the Clock's minute hand was pushed back one minute from five to six minutes before midnight.

The Clock has become a universally recognized indicator of the world's vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and emerging technologies in the life sciences.

The Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) moved the Clock one minute closer to midnight after reviewing the implications of recent events and trends for the future of humanity with input from other experts on nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, climate change, and biosecurity.

In a formal statement on January 10, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists noted: "It is five minutes to midnight. Two years ago, it appeared that world leaders might address the truly global threats that we face. In many cases, that trend has not continued or been reversed. For that reason, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists is moving the clock hand one minute closer to midnight, back to its time in 2007."

Commenting on the Doomsday Clock announcement, Jayantha Dhanapala, member of the BAS Board of Sponsors, former United Nations under-secretary-general for Disarmament Affairs, and ambassador of Sri Lanka to the United States, said:

"Despite the promise of a new spirit of international cooperation, and reductions in tensions between the United States and Russia, the Science and Security Board believes that the path toward a world free of nuclear weapons is not at all clear, and leadership is failing."

Dhanapala further pointed out that the ratification in December 2010 of the New START treaty between Russia and the United States had reversed the previous drift in US-Russia nuclear relations. "However, failure to act on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by leaders in the United States, China, Iran, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Israel, and North Korea and on a treaty to cut off production of nuclear weapons material continues to leave the world at risk from continued development of nuclear weapons."

The world still has over 19,000 nuclear weapons, enough power to destroy the world's inhabitants several times over, said Dhanapala.

An ICAN campaigner and the author of the study, Tim Wright, said: "The vast majority of nations believe it is time to ban nuclear weapons in the same way that biological and chemical weapons have been banned."

Abandon snail's pace

"Nuclear disarmament cannot continue at a snail's pace if we are to prevent the further spread and use of nuclear weapons. It must be accelerated, and the best way to achieve that is through a comprehensive nuclear disarmament treaty with timelines and benchmarks for eliminating nuclear stockpiles," Wright said, adding: "This must be the next big negotiating objective of the international community."

The pressing need for doing away with nukes was also stressed in a historic resolution in November 2011 by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which has close to 100 million members and volunteers worldwide.

The resolution highlighted the humanitarian dangers of nuclear weapons and called on governments "to pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement".

ICAN study finds that support for a treaty to abolish nuclear weapons has grown considerably since 2008, when the UN Secretary-General made such a treaty the centrepiece of his nuclear disarmament action plan.

"At the May 2010 review conference of the ailing Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, two references to a nuclear weapons convention made their way into the agreed outcome document, despite strong protestations from some nuclear-armed nations," notes ICAN. ☞

Above: 'Doomsday Clock'



Arielle Denis, a senior campaigner at ICAN's office in Geneva, believes that governments have a clear popular mandate to ban nuclear weapons. "Right across the world, even in nations with large nuclear arsenals, opinion polls show that a majority of citizens support the elimination of these immoral, inhumane and illegal weapons. The people believe the time has come for their leaders to cast off the nuclear shadow," she said.

But, as Robert Socolow, member of the BAS Science and Security Board, says, "Obstacles to a world free of nuclear weapons remain. Among these are disagreements between the United States and Russia about the utility and purposes of missile defense, as well as insufficient transparency, planning, and cooperation among the nine nuclear weapons states to support a continuing drawdown."

Socolow adds: "The resulting distrust leads nearly all nuclear weapons states to hedge their bets by modernizing their nuclear arsenals. While governments claim they are only ensuring the safety of their warheads through replacement of bomb components and launch systems, as the deliberate process of arms reduction proceeds, such developments appear to other states to be signs of substantial military build-ups."

The way out of this morass is to mobilise public opinion. "Whether meeting the challenges of nuclear power, or mitigating the suffering from human-caused global warming, or preventing catastrophic nuclear conflict in a volatile world, the power of people is essential," says BAS executive director, Kennette Benedict.

"For this reason, we ask other scientists and experts to join us in engaging ordinary citizens. Together, we can present the most significant questions to policy-makers and industry leaders. Most importantly, we can demand answers and action," she adds.

BAS points out that some of the key recommendations for a safer world have not been taken up and require urgent attention. These include ratification by the United States and China of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and progress on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty;

There is a pressing need for implementing multinational management of the civilian nuclear energy fuel cycle with strict standards for safety, security, and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, including eliminating reprocessing for plutonium separation;

BAS also pleads for strengthening the International Atomic Energy Agency's capacity to oversee nuclear materials, technology development, and its transfer.

BAS was founded in 1945 by University of Chicago scientists who had helped develop the first atomic weapons in the Manhattan Project. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists subsequently created the Doomsday Clock in 1947 using the imagery of apocalypse (midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero), to convey threats to humanity and the planet.

The decision to move the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock is made by the Bulletin's Board of Directors in consultation with its Board of Sponsors, which includes 18 Nobel Laureates. □

"Nuclear disarmament cannot continue at a snail's pace if we are to prevent the further spread and use of nuclear weapons. It must be accelerated, and the best way to achieve that is through a comprehensive nuclear disarmament treaty with timelines and benchmarks for eliminating nuclear stockpiles," Wright said, adding: "This must be the next big negotiating objective of the international community."

But, as Robert Socolow, member of the BAS Science and Security Board, says, "Obstacles to a world free of nuclear weapons remain. Among these are disagreements between the United States and Russia about the utility and purposes of missile defense, as well as insufficient transparency, planning, and cooperation among the nine nuclear weapons states to support a continuing drawdown."

Red Cross Movement Wants Nukes Abolished

By Neena Bhandari



SYDNEY - Even as Australia's ruling Labour revoked early December its long standing party policy banning uranium sales to India and Pakistan was swift to stake its claim too, the disarmament movement received a boost with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopting a resolution to work towards a legally binding global convention on nuclear abolition.

The Australian Red Cross (ARC) had worked with the Japanese and Norwegian Red Cross to draft the resolution early 2011, which was passed in Geneva on November 26. The decision to support the initiative was taken by the Council of Delegates of the Movement comprising representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the 187 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and the International Federation.

"We were overwhelmed by our colleagues in a range of countries from Iran, Jordan and Lebanon to Mozambique, Malaysia and Samoa amongst others, who co-sponsored and supported the Red Cross Movement's resolution to urge governments to never use these horrible weapons again. It shows that the resolution has traction and there is a global sense that the Red Cross Movement needs to speak out on this vital issue of nuclear abolition," ARC's Head of International Law and Principles, Dr Helen Durham, told IDN.

The historic resolution appeals to all states to "pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination, negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement."

A record number of states had called for work to begin on a Nuclear Weapons Convention at the May 2010 review conference of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in New York.

The resolution is of critical importance as it challenges the legitimacy of nuclear weapons ever being used as a weapon of war because of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences, in particular on civilian populations, and the threat to the environment and world food production.

Humanitarian imperatives

"There are real legal and humanitarian imperatives for the world to work in a more focused way on nuclear disarmament. The proliferation of these weapons in an increasing number of countries and the threat of other groups gaining capacity to use nuclear weapons should be a wake-up call to the world. The Red Cross will be carrying the message to governments and the wider community," said Dr Durham.

On August 6 (Hiroshima Day) 2011, the ARC had launched the 'Target Nuclear Weapons' campaign calling for the use of nuclear weapons to be made illegal. It asked 'Baby Boomers' to reconnect with the cause that defined a generation in the 1960s and 1970s, and called for a whole new generation to get involved. The campaign has reached over 565,000 people and counting through Facebook posts and tweets.

Today there are at least 20,000 nuclear weapons worldwide, around 3,000 of them on launch-ready alert. The potential power of these would roughly equate to 150,000 Hiroshima bombs.

"If we can achieve treaties to control the use of landmines and cluster munitions then we cannot turn our backs on the need to get agreement on a global convention to outlaw this evil weapon forever," said Australian Red Cross CEO, Robert Tickner. The ARC is working towards deriving bi-partisan support in Australia for a convention to prohibit the use of nuclear weapons.

Since 1945, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have consistently voiced deep concerns about these weapons of mass destruction and the need for the prohibition of their use. Its role in developing the International Humanitarian Law led to the creation of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, the universal rules of war, in 1977. As many as 194 nations of the world, including Australia, have ratified the four Geneva Conventions.

No Nukes But the US and Uranium

While Australia doesn't have any nuclear weapons, it does have arrangements in place in relation to defence with the US in which the supposed protection afforded by US nuclear weapons is seen as key to Australia's national security. It also has almost 40 per cent of the world's known uranium reserves and supplies 19 per cent of the world market.

Canberra has forecast uranium exports to rise from around 10,000 tonnes a year to 14,000 tonnes in 2014, worth around A\$1.7 billion. Australia currently exports uranium to China, Japan, Taiwan and the United States. As Dr Tilman Ruff, Chair of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Australia, told IDN, "ICAN focuses on issues that are related to weapons and proliferation and there are clearly substantial connections to nuclear power as the starting fuel and basic processes are the same. ➔"

Photo above: Dr Tilman Ruff, Chair of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Australia

Any country that can enrich uranium to reactor grade to use for nuclear power generation also has everything it would need to enrich the uranium little bit further to weapons grade, and that is why there is so much concern about Iran's nuclear programme. And any country that has a nuclear reactor could extract plutonium from used reactor fuel and use that to build a nuclear weapon."

"From ICAN's perspective our principal role in relation to nuclear power generation is to draw attention to the fact that the starting material is the same and the effects of radiation are completely indiscriminate and identical whether it is radiation from a nuclear reactor or a nuclear bomb and to highlight that it is simply not possible to continue business as usual on the nuclear power side. It will not be possible to abolish nuclear weapons while there are no constraints on countries enriching uranium or extracting plutonium from spent reactor fuel." Dr Ruff added.

Advocates for a nuclear-free world argue that there are problems with all uranium exports, even if there are safeguards agreements in place with the countries receiving uranium, as there is always a risk that it will be used in weapons. Even if it isn't used in weapons, it will be freeing up domestic reserves of uranium for that purpose.

New analysis by Washington-based independent research organisation, Worldwatch Institute, indicates that countries are turning to other energy sources as a result of high costs of nuclear electricity production, low demand, lower natural gas prices and concerns about health and safety since Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

Despite reaching record levels of 375.5 gigawatts (GW) in 2010, global installed nuclear capacity – the potential power generation from all existing plants – declined to 366.5 (GW) in 2011, according to the Institute's latest Vital Signs Online (VSO) report.

Uranium exports to India

In what was a passionate and at times heated debate on Prime Minister Julia Gillard's motion to allow uranium exports to India, nine delegates spoke against the motion, receiving standing ovation, while seven delegates spoke in favour amidst jeers from those opposed to uranium mining and exports.

Until now the ALP (Australian Labour Party) policy had allowed uranium exports only to countries that have signed the NPT. The Prime Minister's motion was endorsed by delegates with a thin margin of just 21 votes (206 voted in favour and 185 against), revealing deep dissensions even amongst ministers in the Gillard Government on the issue.

Speaking at the 46th ALP national conference in Sydney on December 4, Minister for Transport and Infrastructure Anthony Albanese said, "Until we have resolved the issues of nuclear proliferation and nuclear waste, we should not change our platform to further expand our commitment to the nuclear fuel cycle."

Although construction on 16 new reactors began in 2010, the highest number in over two decades, that number fell to just two in 2011, with India and Pakistan each starting construction on a plant. In addition to this dramatically slowed rate of construction, the first 10 months of 2011 saw the closing of 13 nuclear reactors, reducing the total number of reactors in operation around the world from 441 at the beginning of the year to 433, according to the VSO report.

Together, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and South Korea have contributed around 5 GW of new installed capacity since the beginning of 2010. During this same period, nearly 11.5 GW of installed capacity has been shut down in France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent resolution to work towards an overarching legal convention that sets a comprehensive foundation for the prohibition of nuclear weapons should be adopted by all states as a matter of urgency. □



In what was a passionate and at times heated debate on Prime Minister Julia Gillard's motion to allow uranium exports to India, nine delegates spoke against the motion, receiving standing ovation, while seven delegates spoke in favour amidst jeers from those opposed to uranium mining and exports.

Photo: qrc.org.au

UN Calls For Halting Land Degradation

By Ramesh Jaura



BERLIN - As the international community heads towards [Rio+20](#) to commemorate the historic Earth Summit in June 1992, a senior United Nations official has called for bold actions to put a halt to poverty-generating land degradation. The UN conference in Brazil stressed the need for tangoing environment and development.

The Rio Summit June 20-22, 2012 should take "bold actions towards setting ambitious but attainable targets" that include a "global Zero Net Rate of Land Degradation", UN's Mohamadou Mansour N'Diaye [photo left] said in an interview with IDN.

N'Diaye is chef de cabinet and acting deputy executive secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), emerging from the Earth Summit along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). UNCCD and UNFCCC secretariats are based in Bonn.

The importance of the UNCCD is underlined by the fact that more than one billion people inhabiting drylands in some 100 countries are caught in the pangs of poverty and excruciating hunger.

Every minute, 23 hectares of land are degraded through drought and desertification, eating into the economic, social and environmental pillars of our sustainable development. Drylands comprise one-third of the world land mass and population, 44% of the global food production system, and 50% of the world's livestock. In addition, dry forests are home to the world's largest diversity of mammals whose survival, literally, hangs on the arid zone forests.

The interview of UNCCD's N'Diaye via E-Mail follows:

IDN: It's often said that the socio-economic impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) are underestimated. Are those impacts really measurable?

Mohamadou Mansour N'Diaye (MMN): They are certainly measurable and we need that information so that the cost of action versus inaction is clearly put to the attention and consideration of decision and policy makers.

That is why the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Secretariat of the UNCCD have jointly launched a partnership on the Economics of Land Degradation (E-LD). A study on the costs of desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought is underway. Such valuation will be critical for decision making at various levels.

IDN: What has the UNCCD undertaken and plans to set things right so that the significance of DLDD as an obstacle to global sustainable development is driven home?

MMN: The 194 Parties to the UNCCD have adopted in 2007 the ten-year strategic plan (2008-2018) and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention. 'The Strategy' – as we call it – aims at promoting the functioning of the dryland ecosystem; improve the well-being of the users of these ecosystems; generate global benefits through promoting dryland ecosystem functions and mobilize resources for achieving the Convention's objectives.

The Strategy emphasizes once more that the UNCCD is an essential bridge between sustainable development and natural resource management.

The vision set by Parties to the UNCCD is being materialized and specific indicators are identified to monitor achievements on the ground. In many affected countries it is now fully accepted that without a clear policy on sustainable land management it would

be difficult to meet the objectives identified under the relevant national policy areas.

Therefore the action programmes to combat desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought are mainstreamed in the national policy papers. This demonstrates that more and more decision makers are aware of the fact that the LAND potentials are essential to achieving development.

IDN: What would you describe as the main achievement of COP 10 (tenth conference of parties to the UNCCD) held in Changwon, South Korea, in October 2011?

MMN: Matters relating to the institutional governance of the UNCCD have been solved once for all at Changwon. In addition, the 'Changwon Initiative', which was discussed at Ministerial level aims at complementing The UNCCD Strategy through addressing focused areas, which include: enhancing the UNCCD scientific process; providing a framework for resource mobilization and facilitation of partnership arrangement; engaging the business community and giving recognition to the work and initiatives, which have made a significant and innovative contribution to Sustainable Land Management through the establishment and launching of the Land for Life Award.

IDN: Is the UNCCD now at the cutting edge to combat desertification, land degradation and drought?

MMN: Very much so. If national action programmes to combat desertification / land degradation are fully implemented many of today's global environmental challenges would be better addressed.

This has also been demonstrated at the UN General Assembly high level meeting held in New York last September. World leaders that attended the event have acknowledged the fact that without better land management issues ➔ page 23 bottom

The Road to Rio is Paved With Ambitions

By Richard Johnson

GENEVA - 'The future we want' will draw the focus of Rio+20 – the short name for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 20 to 22. This world summit is perceived as a "historic opportunity to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous world for all".

The 'zero draft' for the outcome document of Rio+20, made public on January 10, underlines that 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where countries adopted Agenda 21, the UN is again bringing together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of smart measures that can reduce poverty. And this while promoting decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources, says the UN Department of Public Information in a special brochure.

Agenda 21 was a blueprint to rethink economic growth, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection. It stipulated that industrialised North will be a role model for the developing South.

What the UN really has up its sleeves in Rio is revealed by a leaked document quoted by the UK Guardian on January 10. The document says: ". . . World

leaders will be called on to sign up for 10 new sustainable development goals for the planet and promise to build green economies. They will also be asked to negotiate a new agreement to protect oceans, approve an annual state of the planet report, set up a major world agency for the environment, and appoint a global 'ombudsperson', or high commissioner, for future generations."

The zero draft will be reviewed during the initial discussions scheduled for January 25-27. Speaking as the first draft of the UN declaration for Rio+20 was released in New York on January 10, Brice Lalonde, the UN's executive coordinator of the conference and former French environment minister, said the second Earth Summit in June "must be the place where decisions on the future of the planet are made, and not just another talking shop for world leaders".

He added: "[The draft] is a good start. Most topics are on the table: from efficient international co-operation to sustainable development goals, from a regular review of the state of the planet to an agency for the environment, from universal access to energy to social safety floors. What is missing now is one verb: to decide. Because to stress, urge, call, recognise, underscore, encourage, support or reaffirm is not enough. When heads of state meet, it should be to decide." ☞



UN Calls For Halting Land Degradation

[Continued from page 22]

☞ of poverty, food security, vulnerability to climate change will remain global challenges for humanity. Without a better understanding of the problems of land degradation and desertification, it would be unrealistic to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in many countries. At the UNCCD we also say that the DLDD are issues relating to security and peace for all.

IDN: UNCCD is one of the three conventions emerging from the Earth Summit in June 1992. Is science coming to the aid of UNCCD so that it is regarded on par with the Climate Change and Biodiversity conventions at Rio+20?

MMN: Since the Earth Summit in 1992, the context has changed dramatically. The phenomenon of land degradation, drought cycles have spread to virtually all parts of the world, not just some ecosystems (arid, semi-arid and dry sub humid areas) already identified. The actions to be implemented thus become global. 40% of the terrestrial ecosystems are concerned and some 2 billion people are faced with multiple challenges relating to DLDD.

The good news is that thanks to the findings of the scientific community, we now have the knowledge to achieve sustainable land management in all regions of the world. With the help of the scientific community our Convention intends to make that knowledge available to all.

At the Rio Summit in June 2012 [which will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg], we call on the world leaders to further express their resolve to address DLDD worldwide through taking bold actions towards setting ambitious but attainable targets that include a "global Zero Net Rate of Land Degradation".

Setting such a target would be instrumental in the sense that it would open possibilities to assess the global status of desertification and land degradation on a scientific basis. ☐



This view is apparently shared by a meeting on Rio+20 at the UN on December 16, 2011. Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang [photo left], who is also Secretary-General of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, said in his closing remarks:

"Many reiterated what was stated in the GA (General Assembly) resolution (64/236) calling for Rio+20, that we must have a focused political document. Many indicated their preference for a single document, not multiple documents that would need to be negotiated in parallel tracks.

"The message on structure I hear is to follow the guidance of the GA resolution, focusing on the objective and two themes. The document should address the deficits that have been identified in implementation, integration and coherence through an action-oriented outcome. Let actions speak louder than words.

"Most want a concise document, though the precise interpretation of that term remains elusive. One delegation has even put a number on 'concise' – 5 pages.

"The overall message from all submissions is clear: be brief and to the point. Be understood by the world; avoid a text full of jargon.

"Many prefer that the vision and declaration of renewed political commitment be accompanied by a set of agreed actions – some called it a framework for action, others a plan, and still others a roadmap. Some want these to be attached in annexes.

"It was also emphasized that actions agreed must specify actors, timeframes, and means of implementation. The need for a compendium, or registry, of voluntary commitments, to accompany the negotiated outcome, was also raised."

Role of Science

Rio+20 should set up a scientific cooperation mechanism drawing on capabilities in both North and South, say Gisbert Glaser and Alice Abreu. In a contribution for SciDevNet they regret that twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit, the sustainable development agenda continues to focus too exclusively on the environment – driven by environment ministries, with woefully insufficient progress overall.

"And over the past 20 years, development has moved us closer to the risk of exceeding 'planetary boundaries' of our Earth system – from the climate to biodiversity, to land use. Yet while facing these challenges we must further enhance efforts towards bridging the development divide between the North and the South, as well as securing greater social equity and human wellbeing," Glaser and Abreu write.

It is therefore essential to ensure, they add, that in the future, "those dealing with our economies also commit to sustainable development and the 'greening' of our economic systems." This is why the Rio+20 world summit will focus on the green economy "in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication".

Glaser and Abreu caution that there will be no green economy without clean technology, innovation and sound science. "The outcome of Rio+20 must therefore include a mechanism to encourage more research and better access to knowledge in all scientific fields."

Gisbert Glaser is senior advisor at the International Council for Science based in Paris, France. Alice Abreu is emeritus professor of sociology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

As far as green economy is concerned, the Rio+20 preparatory process has now agreed that there is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' green economy. The elements of a green economy need to be country- or region-specific, with 'greening' of all economic sectors whether agriculture, information technology or the chemical industry, Glaser and Abreu say.

Making the transition to a green economy will however involve unprecedented efforts to harness science, technology and international cooperation, they write and add: "We need more comprehensive innovation systems based on coordinated policies and sound science that truly integrate the three pillars – environmental, social and economic – of sustainable development."

Understanding this interconnectedness of natural and socioeconomic systems is crucial for addressing global challenges. And it implies a clear role for new, more integrated interdisciplinary research across the natural and social sciences, the scientists say. ➔



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with representatives of the G77 and China on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban.
UN Photo | Mark Garten

This means that recommendations by delegates at Rio+20 should aim to include measures to strengthen links between science and policy, and the science base within institutions. They call upon governments to agree to include in the final Rio+20 outcome document a call for establishing a mechanism for coordinated research on sustainable development challenges, with a major focus on North-South and South-South cooperation.

Ocean

Susan Lieberman, director of International Policy at the Pew Environment Group, said: "We are delighted that although the ocean took a back seat in 1992 at the initial Earth Summit, growing support from countries around the world has now led to its inclusion as one of seven priorities for discussion in Rio. This is a clear recognition that the health of the ocean is vital to sustainable development.

"This draft of the 'outcome document' includes a number of positive marine proposals, including a move toward negotiating a new, legally binding agreement under the UN for the conservation of biodiversity on the high seas, where currently few rules exist. While these are important issues, we also encourage the addition of text that addresses unsustainable fisheries and illegal fishing.

"We hope that between now and June, governments will agree to the current proposed language and add strengthening elements that will help halt overfishing, address destructive fishing practices, and lead to better monitoring and enforcement. We call on governments to take strong, meaningful action for the ocean and the vast diversity of life within it at Rio in 2012."

G-77

Political support to achieve such ambitious goals is indispensable. With this view, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser have urged the bloc of developing countries known as the Group of 77 (G-77) and China to ensure that concrete and actionable measures are adopted at Rio.

"Promoting balanced and stable economic growth and ensuring social equity are essential," said Ban. "Yet the challenges loom large. The debt crisis continues in Europe and elsewhere. Markets are volatile. Budgets are getting squeezed. Unemployment is unacceptably high." Ban added: "The United Nations, with the full commitment of its membership, must act resolutely and decisively. Once again, the role of the G-77 is an important part of the global effort to mobilize political will to achieve sustainable development."

The Group, established in 1964 by 77 States, now includes more than 130 countries, some two thirds of the UN membership, and over 60 per cent of the world's population.

The General Assembly president Al-Nasser stressed the need for coordinated action by G-77 and China to ensure successful outcome of Rio+20.

"I am convinced that under the strong leadership of Algeria (which took over G-77 presidency on January 11) Rio+20 negotiations will lead to a successful outcome and will be an opportunity to give effect to a new vision," Al-Nasser said in a speech delivered on his behalf by his chef de cabinet, Mutlaq al Qahtani.

"This is a vision based on a concrete programme of action for addressing gaps in means of implementation in the sustainable development agenda, as well as on efforts to address new and emerging challenges," he added. □

How European Banks Fuel Hunger

By Jaya Ramachandran



BRUSSELS – A new report by Friends of the Earth Europe has faulted European banks, pension funds and insurance companies for increasing global hunger and poverty by speculating on food prices and financing land grabs in poorer countries.

High food prices negatively impact people in Europe too. Producers and consumers have struggled with high food prices pushing up the cost of living across Europe, says the 44-page report released January 12, 2012.

Titled 'Farming Money', the report analyses the activities of 29 European banks, pension funds and insurance companies, including Deutsche Bank, Barclays, RBS, Allianz, BNP Paribas, AXA, HSBC, Generali, Allianz, Unicredit and Credit Agricole. It discloses the significant involvement of these financial institutions in food speculation, and the direct or indirect financing of land grabbing.

Land-grabs, following direct and indirect investments in land by large European financial institutions, mean European companies are snatching up land, increasingly in Africa, at the expense of local livelihoods and food sovereignty, in addition to causing knock on environmental devastation through land-use change, explains the report.

As the report further points out, food speculation, with billions of Euros flooding in and out of financial products based on foodstuffs, causes price volatility. Such rapid and unpredictable price swings hit the most vulnerable hardest, threatening their right to food, and making it more difficult for farmers to maintain an income – creating instability, hunger and poverty.

Food prices, which are monitored by several bodies including the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Bank, rose steeply in 2007 after a period of relative stability, increasing by an average 56% between January 2007 and June 2008.

This price spike, which led to riots and protests in 25 countries, followed a general rise in commodity prices, particularly in oil. It also coincided with the subprime mortgage crisis, which caused investors to start withdrawing funds from bond markets. Food prices fell again at the end of 2008, only to hit a new all-time high in February 2011.

The UN's FAO has estimated that 100 million more people were pushed into hunger and extreme poverty as a result of the 2007-2008 price increases, triggering riots and protests across the Middle East, South America and Asia.

High food prices hit the poorest the hardest, as they spend a greater proportion of their income on food, says the report. A World Bank study on the impacts of the price increases in June-December 2010 concluded that "the results show that those who are already poor were disproportionately affected by the increase in prices as the share of food in their consumption basket is higher than the non-poor."

For people who sell more food than they buy, high prices mean extra income. The World Bank estimated that 24 million people escaped poverty as a result of June-December 2010 high prices, but 68 million people entered into poverty in the same period.

Price volatility is also damaging. Rapid price swings caused by rapid movement of money in and out of commodity markets mean that farmers cannot predict the price their crops will command. This makes it more costly for farmers to hedge against future price changes. The FAO and OECD have noted that "many governments are concerned about price volatility even in the very short term, because it threatens both farm viability (low prices) and foodsecurity (high prices) [and] affects investment decisions."

In view of this, environmental and development are calling for strict regulation to rein in these destructive activities is the necessary.

Daniel Pentzlin, sustainable finance campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe said: "Food speculation and the financing of land grabbing leads to a catastrophic instability in global food prices – forcing millions of people into poverty and hunger. European banks, insurers and funds that speculate with food and land are gambling with peoples' lives whilst reaping huge profits. This industry needs strict regulation to protect the poorest in society."

The European Commission's proposed new rules for improving transparency in commodity derivatives markets are a first step in the right direction, but serious omissions and loopholes need to be addressed.

Pentzlin was referring to a set of proposals for a revised Market in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II) and a new Regulation (MiFIR) that the European Commission published on October 20, 2011:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/securities/isd/mifid_en.htm 'Farming Money' recommends a set of key measures to regulate European financial markets and tighten corporate policies on financial services and investments in food commodity derivatives and land deals. ➔

Photo: Friends of the Earth Europe

'Farming Money' recommends a set of key measures to regulate European financial markets and tighten corporate policies on financial services and investments in food commodity derivatives and land deals.

The report says: "In order to avoid excessive speculation influencing food prices, the de-regulation that has taken place over the last 20 years must be reversed. Commodity futures markets have become monstrous in size compared to the actual production of the traded commodities, thereby causing volatility and longer-lasting speculative bubbles."

One way to address serious omissions and loopholes in European Commission's proposal of October 2011 is to put caps on the size of the bets speculators can make, so called "hard position limits". These are essential to tackle excessive speculation.

The report pleads for strengthening EU proposals and improving supervisory capacities, adding: "Index speculators and similar types of investors should be banned from agricultural commodity markets. Indexes that track agricultural commodities or commodity derivatives should be excluded from use by index funds, ETFs (Exchange Traded Funds) and related structured and synthetic products."

Friends of the Earth Europe calls upon private financial institutions, including banks, pension funds and investors, to investigate their involvement in food speculation and their direct or indirect investments in land grabs, and publish the results of that research, making it available to relevant stakeholders.

They are asked to liquidate their open positions in food commodity derivatives and related funds and refrain from further activities that are not directly linked to hedging for farmers, food processing companies and related commercial traders.

Commodity index funds and related structured and synthetic products should be phased out. Investments in agricultural commodities and related derivatives should not be retailed to end-customers. Fund managers and financial service providers should apply strict codes of conduct on the use and sale of food commodity products and agricultural land investment as well as respective financial services, says the report.

"2012 offers a big opportunity for Europe to put a stop to the environmental and social damage done by financial markets. Politicians need to step in and end excessive and harmful speculation," Pentzlin said. □

http://www.wdm.org.uk/food-speculation

Egypt Continues March to Democracy

By Ernest Corea



WASHINGTON DC - As the January 23 deadline for the inauguration of Egypt's first post-Mubarak People's Assembly (parliament) approaches, the thoughts of politically conscious Egyptians must inevitably turn to the conundrums that lie beyond the recently concluded elections. Prominent among these is the role of the military as the country continues – or attempts to continue – its transition from oligarchic military rule to a nascent democracy.

President Jimmy Carter's account of how the military views its place in the political structure confirms the crucial nature of this issue. Briefly, the military's approach is: Yes, but. (Carter who was in Egypt as an election monitor had wide ranging discussions with key political figures.)

Al Jazeera reported that following his contacts with the leadership of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Carter said: "The military would like to transfer full control and authority to elected officials." In his assessment, however, "the military wished to continue to have a political role."

Carter explained: "When I met with military leaders, my impression was they want to have some special privilege in the government after the president is elected," and added his own belief that "the military should be completely subservient to the elected civilian

officials".

There you are: Yes, but.

Power Role

The SCAF concept of a democratically elected regime co-existing with an authoritarian military power within the same national power structure appears unworkable. SCAF, it would seem, wants the country to be "slightly democratic."

The armed services, however, appear to be confident about their own strength and unity. This is confirmed by the announced visit to Libya of SCAF head Field Marshal Tantawi. Military leaders who fear that their back is exposed rarely leave home.

On top of SCAF's desire to retain a power-role, the post-Mubarak conduct of the military has been fraught with dangers to civil liberty, as assessed by Amnesty International in its 2011 report on the Middle East and North Africa.

Although SCAF "pledged repeatedly to deliver on the demands of the January 25 revolution," Amnesty International "found that they had in fact been responsible for a catalogue of abuses that was in some aspects worse than under Hosni Mubarak.

"The army and security forces have violently suppressed protests, resulting in at least 84 deaths between October and December 2011. Torture in detention has continued while more civilians have been tried before military courts in one year than under 30 years of Mubarak's rule."

Time to Celebrate

Carter found that 900 claims of election malpractices were made. At the same time, there was much violence during the election period, some of it demonstrably by or with the connivance of the military.

Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties up to now and those that might lie ahead, "the march to democracy has started. These (the elections) are the first fruits of our revolution of January 25. It is time to celebrate. But it is also time to pay homage to the dead and wounded who made this possible. The fallen must never be forgotten," Ismail Serageldin, a distinguished Egyptian intellectual, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and formerly a Vice President of the World Bank, told IDN via email.

Elections to the People's Assembly have been completed, and figures released up to January 9 (i.e. excluding the results of run-off elections held January 10-11) show the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, ahead of other contestants, with a haul of 193 seats out of 498. (Ten more members of the Assembly will be nominated by the President, bringing total Assembly membership to 508.)

The Salafist Al Nour, a conservative Islamist group, was second with 108 seats. Other parties or coalitions that reached double figures were Al Wafd with 38 seats, Egyptian Block (30), Reform and Development (11) and the Revolution Continues (10).

The key responsibility of the Assembly in the coming months will be to choose a 100-member constitutional council that will draft the country's post-dictatorship constitution. The extent to which SCAF keeps its hands off the selection of the council and its deliberations will provide a very clear indication of how interventionist its continuing conduct will be.

Egypt's parliamentary elections were held in three rounds as there are insufficient judges to monitor all the polling stations in the country simultaneously. Forty seven political parties, some of them loose-knit coalitions of like-minded groups, fielded over 6000 candidates in all. ☺

A second three round election will be held from January 29 to March 11 to select the 270 members of Egypt's upper house, the Shura Council. The country's new president is expected to be elected in June.

Even at this stage, however, reaction within Egypt to the transition, long drawn out as it is, from a dictatorship to a democracy grounded in the will of the people, is one of great enthusiasm.

Serageldin captures that spirit when he says:

"The wide spread of political ideas represented in the election campaign is great. Democracy is about pluralism, and pluralism is about differences of views. The point is to settle these differences through the ballot box, not by confrontation in the streets. Egypt needs us all...."

Some 62 percent of eligible voters (over 8 million people) participated in the first round. Compare this with voter turnout in US federal elections of 56.8 percent in 2008 and 37.1 percent in 2006.

"This is the highest turnout in Egypt's history since pharaonic times until now," said Abdel Moez Ibrahim, the head of Egypt's Elections High Commission.

Reaching Out

Throughout the election campaign, the FJP and its originator the Muslim Brotherhood, said that their goal is to create a free, secular state. Much now depends on the extent to which they govern by that assurance.

The Muslim Brotherhood knows that it has achieved a high level of acceptance in society partly as compensation for the suffering it endured under the Mubarak regime, and also because of the social and economic support it provided the poor through efficient and effective networks of health clinics, schools, and other social services.

Expectations of systemic expansion and improvement among those who benefited from these services will be high. This, at a time when Egypt is trying to climb back to the annual GDP growth rate of 7 percent it achieved before it felt the impact of global recession. So this is not a time for ideology but for ideas that can generate action.

It is a time for consensus building and a time for reaching out to combine the various strands of the country's substantial human resources. The world saw what they could achieve together, during the January revolution. But uniting is not going to be easy, particularly after a hard-fought election.

Political parties elected to the Assembly have demonstrated their commitment – at this stage, at any rate – to consensus building, by agreeing to share leadership positions in the Assembly.

A kind of olive branch has, meanwhile been extended to the armed services, through unofficial but distinct speculation about amnesty to the military for past actions.

Changing Course

Internationally, it will be difficult for governments and institutions that played footsie with Mubarak's dictatorship and sus-

tained it, all in the name of "stability," to change course and move into a realistic relationship, based on mutual interests, with a new, post-Mubarak government.



The Government of Israel, already isolated, and now reportedly building a barrier along the Sinai border, will be concerned that Egypt could reject existing bilateral agreements in spite of the assurance by the Muslim Brotherhood and other political entities that they will not.

The US in particular will face tough challenges ahead. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton considered Mubarak a "family friend", she told Al Arabiya in 2009. She will now have to forge a new kind of friendship with whoever becomes her potential partner in the next Egyptian government.

A positive sign is that the US Government has already made contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, thus rejecting the course of antagonism followed by the Bush Administration in reacting to the election victory in Gaza by Hamas, a fraternal party of the Brotherhood.

The US Government has poured billions of dollars into Egypt since the Camp David accords were signed. Most of those aid funds went to Egypt's armed services. Can the US Government and, in particular, the military, find an effective means of using that relationship as leverage to ensure that the Egyptian military does not stand in the way of genuine progress?

Then, of course, there is the brooding, "1000-lb gorilla" encircling the US-Egypt relationship: the issue of Palestinian rights and security. Any Egyptian government that is created by the will of the people will be supportive of the Palestinian cause. That new reality has to be understood and appreciated. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta's recent assertion that Israel must "get to the damn table" is a small but well noted first move.

Free and Just Society

Egypt has launched a process of significance to itself, to the region, and to the international community. Whether that process results in the creation of a truly free and just society will depend very much on the Egyptians themselves. They have, throughout the revolution that tragically took so many lives but dislodged the jackboot of dictatorship, managed their affairs with dedication and skill. There is no reason why they should not continue to manage their post-revolution process in similar fashion.

But, given the world's interdependence, they cannot possibly succeed entirely on their own. They will need and deserve all the support they can muster. □

It is a time for consensus building and a time for reaching out to combine the various strands of the country's substantial human resources. The world saw what they could achieve together, during the January revolution. But uniting is not going to be easy, particularly after a hard-fought election.

UN Help Sought To Halt Organ Theft in Sinai

By Jaya Ramachandran

BRUSSELS - An international non-governmental organisation has called upon the United Nations Human Rights Council, the International Criminal Court and the European Union to help put a halt to organ trafficking in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

The Rome-based EveryOne Group, an organization operating in defence of human and civil rights, has evidence that criminal gangs involved in human trafficking are forcing sub-Saharan refugees lacking money to have their organs removed as payment for their demands for large amounts of cash to take them into Israel.

The Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, situated between the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and the Red Sea to the south, has long been a restive area but reports say that security has slackened after Hosni Mubarak's fall as the police presence thinned out across Egypt.

In an open letter published on January 6, 2012, EveryOne Group's co-presidents – Roberto Malini, Matteo Pegoraro and Dario Picciau – are asking UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, and UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, to use all the instruments at their command to stop organ trafficking.

They are at the same time calling upon the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague to prosecute "the abductions, murders, episodes of torture and rape, extortion, and the illegal removal of kidneys and other organs that has been going on, unpunished, for years in the Sinai".

EveryOne Group has also appealed for help to the governments of Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya, Tunisia, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, the European Union and those countries outside Europe that have links with the trafficking in Northern Sinai, "particularly regarding the deposits – through money transfer agencies or bank accounts – of the ransoms paid by the families of prisoners being held hostage".

The Egyptian Government and the Palestinian authorities should "undertake investigations aimed at dismantling the hideouts of these traffickers, and to free the hostages, granting them the right to international protection, in consultation with (the UN refugee agency) UNHCR, as refugees and victims of trafficking."

Prosecute

The Group is asking the Egyptian and Palestinian authorities to prosecute "the leaders (of those involved in organ trafficking), their collaborators, and the criminal network that works directly or indirectly with them through collusion, bribery, corruption, and contact with the organized crime groups linked to these terrible acts against humanity."

The Group alleges that the heinous phenomenon of organ trafficking "has continued for many years without the authorities of Egypt or the institutions of the Palestinian territories doing anything to block it, despite being aware of the identity and location of the traffickers' hideouts".

UN, EU and "the mainstream media of the civilized world have taken notice of the horrors" being perpetrated in the Sinai: "the

kidnappings, the heavy extortion, murders, kidney transplants, cases of torture and rape", the Group says.

"However, if this information regarding the plight of migrants in the Sinai dries up, this odious trafficking will continue to be carried out along with the general indifference of the world," avers the Group, adding: "We must therefore increase our efforts and transform our anger into civil actions, because the world must stand up and refuse to allow these crimes against humanity to take place.

The Group says, the human and organ trafficking starts out in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan: "Gangs of Rashaida Bedouins promise a better life to young Eritreans at risk of persecution or forced conscription. Once the migrants agree to leave for Israel, the trap is sprung. . . . The Rashaida (and) other gangs are managing the trafficking among the Bedouins of the Sinai."

The Group's letter of complaint adds: "These gangs also use Eritrean, Ethiopian and Sudanese accomplices who communicate with the prisoners and ensure that they ask the family for their ransom money without providing any other information. Some head-traffickers hold Eritrean women prisoner, as wives or concubines, as well as young slaves who have been unable to pay the ransom."

Quoting, among others, sporadic newspaper reports, the Group says: "Young sub-Saharan women are also sent to work as prostitutes in Egypt and the Palestinian territories, where in recent years the trafficking of women has become particularly well-established yet ignored by the international authorities."

Witness accounts

EveryOne Group has analysed witness accounts from refugees, NGOs and human rights defenders who claim to be in possession of the names of traffickers. These, according to the letter, are "members of Palestinian terrorist groups".

It adds: "Weapons, drugs, prostitution, the slave trade and trade in human organs are sources for funding of the terrorists who have adopted the motto that 'the end justifies the means'. They work alongside the world's criminal organizations."

The paramilitary political organisations reportedly work just like the Mafia, making use of cells around the world. "Not surprisingly, relatives of prisoners in the Sinai do not only send their payments to Egypt, Israel, Ethiopia and Sudan, but also to Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and in Europe (Switzerland, United Kingdom, France, Sweden)."

The Group claims to have information that in Rafah, Al-Gorah, al-Arish, Sheikh Zuweid and other cities in the Sinai, "Palestinian smugglers operate through the tunnels between the Egyptian and Palestinian sides of Rafah, along the 'Philadelphia corridor'."

It adds: "These are the barons of weapons, migrants and human organs trafficking. These powerful criminals have possessions in the Egyptian Sinai and in the Palestinian territories, where they move about freely, making use of the workers who until a few years ago worked in the transport of goods through the tunnels, but who in recent years have lost their jobs after Israel granted the free import of many goods." □

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NIGERIA TURNING TO A POWDER KEG
By Uche Igwe*
IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

A wind of disgruntlement is blowing across Nigeria. There are fears that, unless President Jonathan steadies the ship of state, divisions within the polity and the rising discontent could be hijacked by political opportunists to cause something more catastrophic.

'THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR THE HUMAN RIGHT TO PEACE'
By Anwarul K. Chowdhury*
IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint

No time is more appropriate than now to build the culture of peace. No social responsibility is greater nor task more significant than that of securing peace on our planet on a sustainable foundation. Today's world with its complexities and challenges is becoming increasingly more interdependent and interconnected. The sheer magnitude of these requires all of us to work together. Recognition of the human right to peace by the international community, particularly the United Nations, will surely generate the inspiration in creating the much-needed culture of peace in each one of us.

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EGYPT CONTINUES MARCH TO DEMOCRACY
By Ernest Corea*
IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

WASHINGTON DC (iDN) - As the January 23 deadline for the inauguration of Egypt's first post-Mubarak People's Assembly (parliament) approaches, the thoughts of politically conscious Egyptians must inevitably turn to the conundrums that lie beyond the recently concluded elections. Prominent among these is the role of the military as the country continues - or attempts to continue - its transition from oligarchic military rule to a nascent democracy.

RECONFIGURING THE WORLD - LOOKING BACK
By Dirk Messner*
IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint | DIE

BONN (iDN) - There are years that stick in the memory because they are associated with exceptional events: 1989 was the year the Berlin Wall fell, sounding the knell of the East-West conflict, 2001 the year of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while 2008 will always be associated with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the crisis of the world financial market. 2011, too, was a remarkable year, although or perhaps simply because it was not marked by one major global event.

THE LONG SLOW MARCH TO NUKE ABOLITION
By Jamshed Baruah
IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

BERLIN (iDN) - "We want a nuclear weapons free world." More than 80 percent of people around the globe have expressed this overwhelming desire to authors of a new report. But a close look shows that very little is happening rather slowly in terms of reducing nukes and putting a halt to proliferation. This is cause of profound concern also to atomic scientists.

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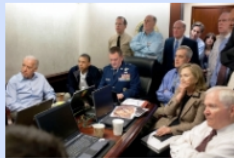
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Five Reasons Why Israel Should Back Nuclear Weapons Ban



Forward To The Future In Quest Of Global Security. Europeans are finding it hard to keep their heads above water as tidal waves of an overwhelming desire for participation in governance pound at the Arab shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The challenge thrown down by Arab uprisings is however only one front in the uphill battle for achieving "security for the global world". Is there a European answer to that challenge?

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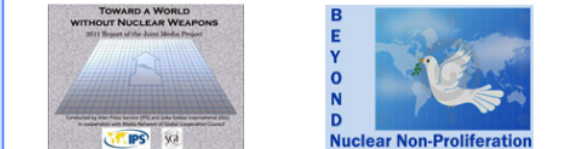


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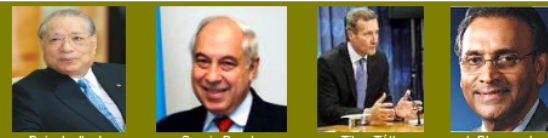


Strengthening Public Awareness For Nuclear Abolition

The Global Cooperation Council has launched a special website as part of a media project of Inter Press Service news agency and Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Buddhist association based in Tokyo.



Some personalities who have been interviewed, have contributed their views or whose views have been incorporated in articles as part of this project are:



Japan Responding Creatively to Crisis

The human spirit has a truly remarkable capacity -the ability to generate hope from the most devastating of crises. This ability to create value can be seen in the response to the earthquake that struck Japan on March 11, writes Daisaku Ikeda, a Japanese Buddhist philosopher and peacebuilder and president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), in a column for IPS.

'Abolish Nukes in the Middle East and Beyond'

As 'people power' topples one Arab regime after another, confronting the international community with an unprecedented volatile situation, an eminent Buddhist leader is urging the

Global Cooperation Council has set up a **Media Task Force** in order to strengthen its media network, with veteran journalist and Sri Lanka diplomat, **Ernest Corea** as president.



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