

PANEL #3

AN INTERFAITH/YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON THE MORAL IMPERATIVE TO ACT

*Quaker Perspective*

by

Jamie DeMarco

Program Assistant for Nuclear Disarmament and Pentagon Spending  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Toward a Fundamental Change in Nuclear Weapons Policy Conference  
United States Capitol Visitor Center  
April 27, 2017

**DEMARCO:** Thank you very much for having me. I want to first answer the question of what role young people have? And let me say that I strongly believe that the nuclear weapons ban treaty that is currently being negotiated is happening because of young people.

It's happening because when I talk to old disarmament folks in the D.C. community about the nuclear weapons ban that's being negotiated, what I tend to hear is that we have the non-proliferation treaty, we've already got one of those, why would we need another one? And first of all, this ban treaty would do much more than the non-proliferation treaty currently does. But also the non-proliferation treaty from my work lobbying in D.C. seems to be more of a 20th century textbook footnote than a force driving disarmament in conversations in this capital.

We need something new to revitalize, to bring new life and that's what youth can bring. It can bring the ability to punch through old stagnating systems. And I think that the very act of saying we can make a treaty that's going to lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons is an act of faith, not necessary religious faith. But to paraphrase Parker Palmer, who is a contemporary Quaker thinker, he says, "If success is the only metric you pursue and you don't have a belief that supersedes that, then what happens is highly predictable. You begin to work for smaller and smaller goals, because that is the only place you can be assured of success."

And I believe it is an act of faith of deep-held belief to shoot for the stars and seek a ban of total elimination. And from my perspective as a Quaker from the Friends Committee on National Legislation, this ban changes everything. There's no text yet, but it could be the first nuclear weapons ban, to ban not only a number of warheads, ban not only a type of warhead, but ban the threat of nuclear weapons.

We at FCNL, the Friends Committee on National Legislation believe that we are seeking a world free of war and the threat of war that not only the act of war. The threat of war is a violent, inherently immoral action. And this ban treaty may be the first to ban such nuclear threat, because deterrence is not a way to peace, deterrence is a standing threat of war against the world. It's a standing legal ultimatum against everyone who isn't us.

And the military leaders who buy in to the theory of deterrence will not feel comfortable or safe or satisfied until each one of us, picture this, is walking around with a little drone hovering next to our head that is

constantly surveying everyone in the world and constantly leveling a gun at their head in case they should ever veer away from U.S. interests. That's the pinnacle of deterrence culture.

And I think we should ask ourselves, is that world and the values behind that world where we all have a personal deterrence drone -- Are those the values that we want to embrace? And is that the world that we want to seek? If you imagine that world where we all have a deterrence drone, even if there was no international armed conflict, could such a world ever be at peace with a constant universal lethal threat? Of course not.

The argument of peace through deterrence, you're talking about oxymorons, it's a complete oxymoron, it's like saying I'm going to seek friendship through blackmail, it cannot be done. It's sincerely disturbing, it's sincerely disturbing like saying that you want to seek love through force. One shudders at the implied implications of the person saying it.

So if deterrence is not going to be a viable path to peace, what values can we embrace? What fundamental principles can we work towards and use to seek a world free of war and the threat of war. There are, of course, an infinitude of answers. But my faith calls me to lift up the value of vulnerability.

Vulnerability, it doesn't sound like something you want. Nobody wants to be vulnerable, it's a bad -- we want to end vulnerability. But there's leading research which shows that vulnerability is central to any functional relationship be it inter-personal or international. To abandon this concept that you need to command and control every action of your neighbor and to embrace the concept that you are building a genuine relationship with your neighbor, building a vulnerable relationship with your neighbor. And there is an infinitude of successful examples and effective examples of the use of vulnerability.

But my faith calls me in this moment to lift up the example of one particularly well known example, the example of Jesus. And the image we all remember Jesus with, a quintessential image of Jesus is a quintessential image of vulnerability, arms spread wide, life force flowing out at your wrists and not a muscle twitched in retaliation. Jesus, who we hear had the power to command the very storms and calm the very waves of the sea, allowed himself to be crucified by a handful of Roman soldiers.

And on that day, it may have seemed as though Jesus was the loser and that the Roman Empire was winning bigly, but 2000 years later, the Roman Empire has crumbled into dust in history while the message of Jesus is alive and well. Through his physical vulnerability on that day, he made himself and his movement effectively unconquerable. And I think that's what we can do in the world today and follow that example.

To dismantle a culture of deterrence, to embrace a culture of vulnerability, to support the nuclear weapons ban treaty in the U.N., which I think is doing both of those things. And to take the example of many who have come before us who've made a better world through vulnerability. Thank you.