

PANEL #4

TOWARD A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

**The Ban Treaty and Beyond: The Road to Nuclear Abolition**

by

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Toward a Fundamental Change in Nuclear Weapons Policy Conference

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ACHESON: After today's interesting and sometimes depressing and occasionally humorous, but ultimately back to depressing conversation that we've had, I just want to start my remarks by saying that, "We're banning nuclear weapons!"

(APPLAUSE)

This is -- it's no longer a hypothetical possibility, it's no longer something we're just campaigning for. This is something that we've done, that is happening and that is going to have some kind of impact even if we can't predict exactly what that's going to be.

So, as we covered in today's conversation, there is a lot of bad stuff happening, when it comes to nuclear weapons, there's all the modernization and development programs. There are these rising tensions, I won't go over all of that because we've heard enough of it.

So, one of the key questions about the ban in this context is what exactly is it that we are trying to do, why does banning nuclear weapons without any of the nuclear-armed states even matter? These are the types of questions that I am sure everyone in this room has to contend with at some point or another.

The idea of course behind this entire movement to ban the bomb, is that unfortunately we can't just go to the nuclear-armed states and take away their weapons. I think we all wish we could do that, but given that we can't, the only thing left for us to do is to change every other single thing that we possibly can in relation to the context of nuclear weapons, the legal, economic, political, social context of nuclear weapons. We have to change all of those elements in every way that we can as citizens or as governments of states that do not possess nuclear weapons.

This is about stigmatizing the weapons. This is about undermining deterrence. This is about affecting the way that people perceive these weapons as legitimate tools of security and changing that back to what they really are which is suicidal, genocidal weapons of mass destruction, and terror and harm.

So, how are we doing this? Well, we've already done it. We've already done a big piece of this work and that's been through the humanitarian initiative. This has been a re-energization of the discourse around nuclear weapons as weapons that kill, that are designed to kill, that are designed to commit genocide, to wipe out entire populations.

Changing this conversation was the most important first step to getting us on the road to banning nuclear weapons. And it's been incredibly effective already, we don't even have a ban yet and it's already been incredibly effective in changing the way that other governments also perceive this.

There was a time in the United Nations when you couldn't even use the "D-word" for a while. It was all non-proliferation. Disarmament wasn't something that was really sellable. When Obama came along and did this Prague speech and the four horsemen wrote their op-ed, then there was this little, little tiny hope that we could start talking about disarmament again.

And it lasted less than a year and then it was back to non-proliferation, non-proliferation, non-proliferation. And it was more and more money being important in nuclear arsenals, more and more stalemates over agendas at the United Nations, no movement anywhere, no traction on anything.

But the humanitarian initiative changed all of that just by changing the way that nuclear weapons are talked about and perceived. And the results of that has been governments from every country going to a series of conferences to talk about what nuclear weapons really are even though the nuclear-armed states boycotted these meetings. The P5 collectively boycotted the first meeting and even issued a statement sitting in the conference on disarmament which hasn't done anything for 20 years to say that we were distracting from real work.

And that is another thing that this process is already changed. This idea that the nuclear-armed states get to tell us what we can and can't do. This idea that if the P5 collectively oppose something, then it can't go forward.

We are already in a transformative process of the ban treaty, We've already cleared these hurdles. We've shown those to be surmountable obstacles. They were in the way for a long time, but now we can go ahead. It really smashed up the concept of what can happen at the United Nations and how it can happen.

The vote in the general assembly last October to initiate these negotiations was incredible, 123 countries pressed yes, on their little voting machines to start these negotiations. That was despite United States taking its biggest delegation ever to the general assembly to try and shut this down. The Obama administration went to its NATO allies and instructed them to vote against this. The U.S. delegation was also meeting with all of the different regional groups trying to pressure them to not participate as were the French and the U.K. delegations.

There was a lot of pressure on these countries, but they did it anyway, 123 of them said, yes, we're going to start this and we don't care, if you don't want us to. That attitude continued in March, when the negotiations first began. And what we saw there was by our account, there was over 130 governments that participated in that meeting. Japan doesn't want to be counted among them of course, but it showed up and it ran a statement so we count it as participating.

The Netherlands also of course participated, the only NATO state to defy the orders of the U.S. government to stay away from these negotiations. And the reason that that happens by the way, is civil society. Civil society

mobilization in the Netherlands got in parliament an order for the government to attend. The government is being forced to attend by its parliament, it does not want to be there and so, they came and delivered one statement and they sat in the room and said, basically nothing the whole time. But they had to be there, because civil society demanded it.

This is another change, this is another change about how citizens and parliaments and other entities within states can have an impact on government policy, when it comes to nuclear weapons. They don't get to tell us what we can do. They don't get to limit our actions and the impact of our actions anymore. And that also carried forward in the ban negotiation starting in March, when we had the best interactions from civil society that we've had in the U.N. meeting on disarmament issues ever.

We had and the ability to engage with states for six hours on a panel that allowed us to answer questions from states. We also had organizations from all over the world delivering interventions and asking questions as well. This is unprecedented when it comes to disarmament, but this is exactly the kind of transformation that the ban treaty is bringing.

And like I said, all of this has happened and we don't even have a treaty yet. So, imagine, what's going to happen when we do have this treaty, what could its impacts be? We see that there is going to be a legal impact, first and foremost, very straight forward. Nuclear weapons will finally be on the same footing as chemical weapons and biological weapon.

This has an impact politically and socially and economically. If we take the economics for example to start with, the other weapon systems that have been banned chemical, biological also landmines and cluster bombs. There is so much stigma around these weapons and so much opposition to their use and their manufacture and their trade that it's extremely difficult to get away with using these weapons or making these weapons.

The United States has not signed either or has not ratified either the cluster munitions or landmine ban treaties, yet it very nearly complies with all of the obligations of state's parties in those treaties. And just last year, the last cluster munitions producing company in the U.S. decided that it will no longer manufacture these weapons.

And this is because of the social stigmatization, the political stigmatization and also the economic divestment that went along with these ban treaties. And one of the most interesting things for us when we started doing the don't bank on the bomb work a few years ago in ICAN was when we were calling banks or pension funds or other entities that did have divestment portfolios and had divested from cluster munitions and landmine producing companies and we asked them why don't you have a similar policy on nuclear weapons? They would tell us, it's because nuclear weapons aren't illegal.

And that was one of our first signs that, OK, well we've got to fix that. So, that was one of our motivations and all of these -- all of these come together. These legal, political, social, economic impacts of the act of stigmatization, of the act of making it very clear that these weapons are illegal, that all activities associated with them are illegal is extremely important. And like Zia said this morning, the ban is going to change the context in which future nuclear policy is made.

It's true that we don't know exactly what effects it will have, this is all hypothetical. We're working on the basis of past experience with other treaties and a little thing called logic. Jamie said today that it's an act of faith. I haven't really thought of it like that before. I think of it more as an active mass of rebellion in the United Nations to be doing this. But I think it is faith and it's also hope that we can really change things. It's not just about nuclear weapons like Setsuko said, the ban treaty is not just about banning nuclear weapons. It's about how we live, it's about how we communicate. It's about what we can build together collectively.

And the ban is already having an impact on that and it's going to have an even bigger impact once we do have it. We have been called names, Barry was saying about advocates for nuclear disarmament being called naive et cetera. I've also heard irrational, delusional, irresponsible, my personal favorite is terminally unserious. I think that might be what I call my book when I write about all this, one day.

And Daryl said that the response of these countries should be to take action on disarmament, for other policies to reduce nuclear danger or something so that it looks like they're taking care of it and we don't need to do anything. Instead, over the last few years, they've just become increasingly belligerent and they've called us all these things. The Russians once said that we had shot off to outer space or some other planet. The U.S. Ambassador to Geneva once said that the ban treaty could result in the use of nuclear weapons, because it would so destabilize the world that it will lead to nuclear war and they call us terminally unserious, I don't know.

But we're doing this, we're banning nuclear weapons and we're opening the space for disarmament that doesn't currently exist. There's a lot of paths to abolition, the nuclear-armed states could join the ban treaty and they could agree to some kind of plans to get rid of their nuclear weapons. They could unilaterally disarm because all their investments get taken away from the prohibition treaty and they can't function anymore or they make some other kind of calculation based on the stigmatization and the public pressure that they'll talk in their countries about this issue.

They could enter together and do multi-lateral agreements as they are supposed to do under Article VI of the non-proliferation treaty. There are a lot of options, these probably aren't the only options, but they're the only all options that we want on the table, really. And the ban is creating that space for any of those to be pursued and we'll hopefully help compel and facilitate moves towards disarmament that we haven't had in years.

We don't know how effective the ban is going to be, but we know it's already having an impact. And we need to mobilize publicly now in ways that we haven't yet around the ban treaty negotiations, need to amplify what's going on inside the U.N. to the outside. There is a lot going on in the world, there is a lot going on in this country and there is marches all the time and there are a lot of issues that people care about.

And I think one of the really key things about promoting the ban treaty is connecting how all of those different social justice issues that we're all working on in our lives connect when it comes to nuclear weapons. Whether that's because of the threat of nuclear weapons or whether that's because of history of opposition to nuclear weapons being extremely intersectional and dynamic.

But there is a lot of ways to make these arguments about why a ban on nuclear weapons should be important to everybody regardless of ethnicity or gender, religion or race, income or any other issue that we identify with.

And one of the ways that we're doing that in the next few months is, a women's march to ban the bomb. Building off of the women's march on Washington and sister marches that happen in 600 cities around the world. So, June 17th in New York City, there is going to be a massive public demonstration in March from Bryant Park to just across the street from the United Nations. There's some post cards on the table outside, you can actually even mail them, they're quite clever, they have a little postage stamp on the back.

And so, please take as many as you want for distribution. We're also organizing sister marches and other solidarity events around the world. We already have a bunch in Australia lined up, basically every major city in Australia is hosting an event. There is going to be stuff going on in Chicago and L.A. and hopefully other U.S. cities and hopefully in Canada, hopefully in Toronto as well.

So, there's going to be a lot of action and activity around that. If you're interested in getting involved, we welcome you to join us to endorse the march to organize your own event, to help us fundraise for this one. All the information you need is at [womenbanthebomb.org](http://womenbanthebomb.org) and we look forward to working with you on that and to secure the treaty by July 7th.

Thanks.