

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

WELCOME

By
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HALL: Today's conference is the result of the support of many individuals and organizations. It would not have been possible without the wisdom and encouragement and guidance of our wonderful Steering Committee. I would like to take a moment to recognize them. Thank you Barry Blechman from Stimson Center, Lilly Daigle from Global Zero, Martin Fleck from Physicians for Social Responsibility, Ira Helfand from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Matthew McKinzie from Natural Resources Defense Council, and Elana Simon from Physicians for Social Responsibility. They have been my comrades over the past few months, really helping me pull this event together, and I'm greatly appreciative to them.

Also, when we first put out a call for co-sponsors for this event, we had a litmus test. The question was, do you support a fundamental change in nuclear weapons policy? And it was so encouraging and already a victory that so many organizations responded in the affirmative, "Yes, we support a fundamental change in nuclear weapons policy." So please join me in thanking our many outstanding co-sponsoring organizations.

SGI-USA, thank you for convening this conference; Arms Control Association, Citizens For Global Solutions, Global Zero, Hibakusha Stories, IPPNW International Physicians For The Prevention of Nuclear War, Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Peace Action, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Ploughshares Fund, Stimson Center, Union of Concerned Scientists, Women's Action for New Directions, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, The American Values Network, Islamic Society of North America, Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns, Pax Christi-USA, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries, and United Methodist General Board of Church and Society. Thank you so much.

It's so heartening and encouraging to have that level of support. We also received several wonderful messages of support for today's event. For example, we received a message from the Lieutenant Governor of California, Gavin Newsom. We also received a message from Daisaku Ikeda, the President of the Soka Gakkai International. We thank them for their support of today's conference.

Today's conference is actually a follow up to a symposium that took place in 2014 at the United States Institute of Peace that focused on faith communities and the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Since then the international dialogue on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has evolved to the UN nuclear ban treaty negotiations that are currently taking place in New York that started last month and will conclude this summer. And if the treaty is agreed to, it will forever change the legal and moral environment in which disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations take place, moving forward.

That and also given our present day realities of nuclear crisis that exist in the world, on the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere, we thought it was a very appropriate time to reconvene the stakeholders in DC for a conversation on the need for a fundamental change in nuclear weapons policy.

A conversation that acknowledges that the very real catastrophic risks of nuclear war, whether intentional or accidental, so far outweigh any possible stabilizing or deterrent effect that nuclear weapons might provide, that the only way we can ensure our national and international security is to actively and seriously look at replacing the basis of our national and international security with something else that doesn't place human civilization on the brink of civilization -- the brink of extinction.

A fundamental change in nuclear weapons policy, that's what we're here to talk about today. We will have panelists talking about major flash points around the globe, including Northeast Asia, South Asia, US-China relations, US-Russia relations, looking at accidental nuclear war. We'll look at the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, what actually happens when a bomb detonates. We will hear from a Hiroshima bomb survivor.

We will look at the climate effects of nuclear war, the agricultural effects, the famine effects of both large scale and small scale nuclear exchanges. You will look -- you'll hear from a panel of young people, leaders from diverse faith communities who will share their perspectives on the moral imperative to take action to reduce risk and rid the world of nuclear weapons. And then, we will look squarely at the theme of our conference today, a fundamental change in nuclear weapons policy.

We will ask a question that quite frankly is not often asked in Washington, D.C.: Is nuclear deterrence a sustainable policy? We will look at the short-term steps, immediate steps that the United States could take right now to help reduce risks. And we will explore the UN nuclear ban treaty negotiations and try to illustrate a pathway -- a clear pathway by which a world free from nuclear weapons could actually be achieved, so it doesn't seem so abstract and impossible in the minds of the general public because, if the public can envision it concretely, then they can make concrete demands from their political leaders to make it a reality.

The vision of a world free from nuclear weapons is a vision shared by today's first guest speaker, Congressman Hank Johnson. I had the pleasure of meeting with Congressman Johnson recently, where he spoke with me for almost an hour about this issue, shared his deep passion for peace, and his conviction that the long-term aim of our country must be a world free from nuclear weapons. We're very honored to have him with us today. Please join me in welcoming to the podium Congressman Hank Johnson.