

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

WELCOMNG WORDS

by

Congressman Hank Johnson

United States Representative for Georgia's 4th Congressional District

JOHNSON: Good morning everyone. Welcome to your capital -- your capital hall of visitors here, your Capitol Visitor's Center, which is a very nice facility and it's a hardened facility, in case there should be some kind of attack. And then, we the policy makers, who hopefully have been very careful in our policymaking, we will then be able to escape the holocaust by coming down here. And I hope that that won't be necessary, and that's why I'm so happy to be here today and to offer my heartfelt greetings to the SGI-USA, General Director Adin Strauss and to all of the panelists who will be here today.

And also, I want to thank all of you who will participate in this very significant and very timely conference, entitled "Toward a Fundamental Change in Nuclear Weapons Policy."

I want to thank Danny Hall for his hard work and diligence in pulling this event together. He's worked very hard with all of the stakeholders, all of you, and I want to thank the Soka Gakkai International under the leadership of President Daisaku Ikeda, a longtime proponent for the eradication of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth, for inviting me to share my thoughts with you.

I'm honored to come speak in support of the goals underlying this event and SGI's mission, which is the promotion of peace, culture and education. These are universal values. To promote peace, we must tackle the issue of nuclear weapons. The unchecked proliferation of nuclear weapons poses a great danger to every human being living in this world and to overall global security. Even the potential introduction of nuclear weapons itself is a highly destabilizing event, as can be seen from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific.

When the P5+1 negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which resulted in stopping the nation of Iran from having the capability to develop a nuclear weapon, it really set in place a great mechanism for solving these issues. And it's disturbing that we have politicians today who still threaten to perhaps dismantle or pull out of that agreement, which by all accounts is working. So that's the formula for being able to solve these issues of nuclear proliferation -- dialogue -- and not just one nation to another or bilateral, but multilateral negotiations because all nations have a stake in having and maintaining a peaceful environment.

And so now we come to yesterday, where two busloads of United States Senators were bused over to the White House for a dramatic display of urgency about the nation of North Korea and its threat to world security. And after that display with the two buses at the White House, came the same presentation made to members of the House of Representatives right here in the Capitol Visitor Center.

And I can tell you that, while dialogue is a part of the plan, there's also contingencies being considered, which would involve a strike to try to resolve this issue militarily, with of course the U.S. taking a unilateral approach to it -- and at the same time, with the risk of hundreds of thousands of people in South Korea possibly dying as a result of such a decision. I'm afraid I don't have great confidence in a decision by the U.S. being made to favor human life, because the human life that would be extinguished would be thousands of miles away from the U.S. And so, the question becomes, do we really care in this country with our policies about all of mankind, or are we simply concerned about the USA and our allies. These are the fears that come to mind when I think of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and its testing of ballistic missiles by which to deliver those weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear disarmament is a vital long-term goal of the United States, and must remain so in order to ensure peaceful relations in the global community. A nuclear-free world is ultimately in the best interest of all nations and we must continue to take steps towards disarmament whilst it's still deterring our adversaries.

Our current strategy of mutually assured destruction is a strategy that would work if everyone is playing fair. But, we see that there are some actors out there who take an asymmetric approach to their dealings and they're unpredictable and they don't play by any set of rules and they may even have a mentality of not really caring about the end result. So when you get madmen who are at the controls of nuclear weapons, then the issue of mutually assured destruction becomes just a mad concept of theory that may or may not work. And so we can't continue to rely on that theory and we do need a change in nuclear weapons policy in this country and throughout the world.

While I was a member of the House Armed Services Committee for five terms, I consistently supported nuclear non-proliferation and was a steadfast opponent of increasing our nation's nuclear arsenal. I can tell you that, from time to time, when I would raise my lonely voice, I would be looked at as if I was crazy for even thinking that such a thing could be possible.

But it is possible, it is doable and we have to -- we have to start somewhere. I've increasingly come to recognize that the importance of a world free of nuclear weapons is worth the fight. This is a long process however and it will require cooperation and planning. In the short term, we should support the modernization of our nuclear weapons in order to ensure that we can best control our own nuclear weapons so that no accidents occur.

Maintaining a state-of-the-art nuclear arsenal as opposed to letting it deteriorate is also important to deterring rogue nations from threatening world security. However, we can't let that be our end goal. That end goal needs to be the eradication of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.

I strongly believe that in a long time we should work towards a nuclear-free world and this will require us to embark on a long-term journey in order to reach that goal. It's going to involve dialogue -- multilateral dialogue -- and respect ultimately for the lives of all people on this earth, regardless of where they live.

It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I hope that today's panel exhibition is that single first step in our long journey, the end destination being a nuclear-free world. So have a

great conference today. Thank you all for coming and I look for great things to happen as a result of this. Thank you very much.