

Jonas Gahr Støre
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway

Keynote address to the 2008 Oslo Conference on
Nuclear Disarmament (26 February)

Check against delivery

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered here largely because there is no compelling answer to these simple, compelling questions: Why do we need thousands of nuclear weapons? Do they make the world safer? Is anybody out there prepared to do anything about them?

This is not the first time we have raised these questions. When I was a university student in Paris in the first half of the 1980s, these questions were mobilising a whole generation. I remember the heated debates over how NATO should respond to the Soviet SS-20. I recall the long shadow of an arms race that seemed to have no end. And I remember how we asked ourselves where we could find leaders who would turn the tide and reject the logic that demands ever more nuclear weapons and missiles?

I remember being a pessimist. But then came the redemptive promise of Reykjavik. At the height of the Cold War, the "warriors-in-chief" spoke openly and sincerely, I believe, about a world without nuclear weapons. The Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) and successive agreements kindled great optimism.

The arms control roller coaster of the 1980s, with its dips of despair and ascents of hope, was formative for me. It propelled my interest in international relations and inspired my personal commitment to advancing the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. And the bold and surprising move by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan convinced me that real leadership might be found, even from expected quarters.

So it is not only an honour, but it is deeply fulfilling personally for me to welcome all of you to Oslo. I hope this gathering will add momentum to a new global effort towards fulfilling the vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

It is a particular pleasure - as always - to welcome the Director-General of the IAEA and 2006 Nobel Peace Laureate, Dr ElBaradei.

And it is an honour to be joined by Secretary Shultz, America's top diplomat during the 'turmoil and triumph' of my student days, and by Senator Nunn, who is not only an American hero, but a Norwegian one, too, for his Herculean efforts to curb the nuclear threat.

The willingness of Secretary Shultz and Senator Nunn to co-host this event is a testament to their distinguished brand of leadership - one of vision, of action, of persuasion and of principle. They recognise that our vision must be a joint enterprise -among states, among scholars, among civil society actors, and among peoples. I sincerely thank them for being here and for helping to organise this event.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the light of the growing threats of proliferation and nuclear terrorism, and of the persistent threats of nuclear war or accidents, we are compelled today to ask again not only: Why so many? but also: Why any at all?

A world free of nuclear weapons has been a longstanding aspiration of my country's foreign policy, even during the Cold War. Indeed, it has been a core foreign policy priority for many nations for decades. As you all know, it has also been the shared goal of numerous civil society groups in nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states alike.

But I believe we are now at a turning point. Today the old calls of the faithful are being joined by a chorus of new voices, especially in nuclear-weapon states. Last summer, Margaret Beckett strongly reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Earlier this month, UK Defence Secretary Des Browne announced the intention to host a meeting of nuclear-weapon states with a view to improving technologies for verifiable disarmament. And as all of you are well aware, a growing number of US leaders, led by Secretary Shultz and Senator Nunn, are calling on Washington to recommit itself to leading the world towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Achieving our vision will require a powerful coalition, and today we see its outlines. Coming together are realists who comprehend the power of

idealism and idealists who understand the force of facts and realities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A vision is not the same thing as a dream. Vision has been fundamental for human progress, even when it has invited scepticism, even when it has not been fulfilled.

Our visions of human rights, equality, social justice and protection of the vulnerable, as set out in national declarations or in international agreements, have often been articulated in situations of great adversity. This made them all the more vital.

The story of our vision is not so different.

The failure of the Baruch Plan in 1946 put a stop to the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons for more than two decades. But this changed in 1968, when the NPT was signed. The NPT sets out an alternative path to the serious nuclear threats of the 1960s - the Cuban Missile Crisis, the

accelerating arms race and the fears of rapid, uncontrollable nuclear proliferation.

The NPT did not make anyone believe that nuclear disarmament could be achieved immediately. It did not provide for exactly it would be accomplished. But it did contain a solemn commitment not just to contain, but to roll back the nuclear peril. It enshrined a bold vision: a world free of nuclear weapons.

The nuclear threat did not disappear. Mutually Assured Destruction persisted. Moreover, nuclear restraint relied in part on a nuclear umbrella. If it were not for NATO, many more states in Europe probably would have sought to develop nuclear weapons.

But the vision of the NPT reframed the nuclear landscape. States could foresee a future in which their neighbours, their foes, their partners might decide against going nuclear. They inferred that the prestige previously associated with nuclear weapons might be declining rather than increasing. They could consider options for achieving security by other means.

At the end of the Cold War, there was dramatic progress. The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty transformed European security. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties initiated deep cuts in US and Soviet strategic nuclear forces. A Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty was negotiated. Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine and South Africa gave up nuclear weapons. Argentina and Brazil agreed that their security was better ensured by a continent free of nuclear weapons.

This momentum contributed to the landmark indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 and to agreement on the '13 steps' in 2000.

That momentum, however, has foundered on a number of challenges. We are seeing nuclear ambitions in North Korea and Iran, and a darker spectre of nuclear terrorism and competing demands for energy security and non-proliferation. We have seen the ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty falter, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty stalled and key commitments made in 2000 broken.

The grim subtext has been a creeping abandonment of our vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Combined with the short-sighted assumption that, because we have been spared nuclear war to date, because no acts of nuclear terrorism have yet been perpetrated, the status quo is somehow secure.

That, my friends, is our Achilles heel: the false assumption that status quo is less risky than change.

So this should be the purpose of our endeavour: to review and revive our vision; to mobilize the political will needed to move forward; and to arouse those who fallen into pessimism.

At Reykjavik, US and Soviet leaders paved an optimistic way forward. Such political resolve can be mobilised again. We must make this pathway attractive for a new generation of US and Russian leaders - just as we must engage China's leaders.

I believe we have a powerful case.

Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, much has been said about the difficulty of addressing low-probability yet highly destructive terrorist attacks. This threat certainly compels us to take urgent action to prevent nuclear terrorism. But why

should we not work with equal urgency to reduce the risk of nuclear accidents or inadvertent nuclear war?

Consensus behind our vision is vital if we are to address gaps in the non-proliferation regime. Just consider the challenge created by the expanding use of nuclear energy. I commend the efforts of Dr ElBaradei as well as Senator Nunn and Warren Buffett to establish an international fuel bank, and we should encourage contributions to it.

But at the same time, we must recognise that many states today are facing a critical choice. They have - or are rapidly accumulating - the technology, know-how and infrastructure to develop domestic nuclear fuel cycle capability. Whether they choose to take part in multilateral fuel arrangements, or whether they choose to hedge their bets, will depend not only on economic factors but also on another basic question. Are we facing a future security environment in which nuclear weapons are deemed essential, or one in which their role is diminishing?

It is only the elimination of nuclear weapons that can tip the balance in this equation.

The vision of elimination is equally relevant to the threat of nuclear terrorism. This is a concern for all of us. Regardless of where such an attack might occur, we would all be affected. In addition to reducing the quantity of vulnerable fissile materials, disarmament and elimination will also secure the sustained international cooperation required to address the threat - from UN Security Council resolution 1540 to the minimisation of Highly Enriched Uranium. A viable agenda of disarmament and elimination will spur our effort to strengthen the institutions needed to sustain the vision.

As Senator Nunn put it, our vision might not inspire every determined proliferator to 'see the light'. But it will inspire more nations to join in concerted global efforts to halt proliferation, to build a sustainable nuclear future, and to prevent nuclear terrorism.

Let us be clear. Very few, if any, non-nuclear-weapon states believe that full nuclear disarmament is possible, or even desirable, overnight. Realists and idealists can agree that nuclear weapon technology cannot be disinvented. International

security as we know it is dependent on deterrence postures in which nuclear weapons maintain a pivotal role.

But these postures are neither inevitable nor immutable. Secretary Shultz, Senator Nunn and their colleagues have come to the same conclusion. They have argued that US security interests would be best served by working towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

This also holds true for my own country and for the world.

The path ahead is clear:

- We must consolidate the ban on nuclear testing, securing the entry into force of the CTBT and maintaining support for the CTBTO.
- We must negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty to help prevent nuclear arms races in the 21st century.
- We must continue to reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons.

- We should consider carefully how to move from a world with thousands of nuclear weapons, to a world with hundreds, and eventually to zero nuclear weapons. It will not happen overnight, but the course needs to be set. Confidence in the credibility of the non-proliferation regime is essential.

- We must find the strength, unity and resolve needed to discourage and punish proliferation.

- It is not enough for we who are non-nuclear weapon states to call on nuclear-weapon states to fulfil the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. Progress will require all states to play an active and constructive role. My Government, for instance, has developed, together with the UK Ministry of Defence, ways to enhance confidence in verified disarmament - particularly as regards the verification of warhead dismantlement.

- We must also responsibly address the challenges of moving toward zero. This means answering questions about the stability of low numbers of nuclear weapons - not with a Cold War mindset, but with one appropriate for the world of

today. It means developing confidence in an international security architecture without a nuclear umbrella. It means ensuring that disarmament defuses rather than inflames regional conflicts.

My list is far from complete, and each of these goals and challenges demands its own roadmap. That is why we have invited you to Oslo.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Too often we are presented with false choices: between non-proliferation and disarmament; between non-proliferation and counter-proliferation; between expanded use of nuclear energy and rampant proliferation; between the arguments of 'realists' and the arguments of 'abolitionists'.

We cannot consolidate and maintain the non-proliferation regime while neglecting the bold vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. We will delay and undermine nuclear disarmament unless we demand robust and credible non-proliferation.

Abolitionists can be realists, and realists, abolitionists.

In 2005, Norway initiated the seven-nation initiative on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to show support for precisely this approach. The initiative's diverse membership - Australia, Chile, Indonesia, Norway, Romania, South Africa and the United Kingdom - demonstrates the need to challenge previous conventional wisdom, and to reach out across Cold War dividing lines to create new alliances for change.

Together, these seven nations are calling for 'practical, systematic and progressive efforts...towards a world free of nuclear weapons'. At the same time, we are calling for tougher IAEA safeguards, for recognition that 'states may choose to fully enjoy the benefits of nuclear energy without developing a domestic fuel cycle capability'.

We insist that there is common ground for a wide-ranging agenda that is consistent with the vision of eliminating nuclear weapons. And we hope to contribute to a renewed consensus and a renewed vision at the NPT Review Conference in 2010.

Once again, welcome to all of you to Oslo. I hope you will actively take part in this opportunity for creative and bold thinking.

I would like thank all of you for joining us here today. Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons is no less than a historic challenge which involves safeguarding our human future. Future generations will either condemn us for our failure or - as I hope - revere us for our success in achieving this goal.

I wish you a fruitful and rewarding conference and look forward to our discussions.