

A World Free of Nuclear Weapons

**By Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi
United Nations General Assembly,
New York,
June 9, 1988**

We are approaching the close of the twentieth century. It has been the most bloodstained century in history. Fifty-eight million perished in two world wars. Forty million more have died in other conflicts. In the last nine decades, the ravenous machines of war have devoured nearly one hundred million people. The appetite of these monstrous machines grows on what they feed. Nuclear war will not mean the death of a hundred million people. Or even a thousand million. It will mean the extinction of four thousand million the end of life as we know it on our Planet Earth. We come to the United Nations to seek your support. We seek your support to put a stop to his madness.

Humanity is at a crossroads. One road will take us like lemmings to our own suicide. That is the path indicated by doctrines of nuclear deterrence, deriving from traditional concepts of the balance of power. The other road will give us another chance. That is the path signposted by the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, deriving from the imperative values of nonviolence, tolerance and compassion.

It is a dangerous delusion to believe that nuclear weapons have brought us peace. It is true that in the past four decades, of the world have experienced an absence of war. But a mere absence of war is not a durable peace. The balance of nuclear terror rests on the retention and augmentation of nuclear armouries. There can be ironclad guarantee against the use of weapons of mass destruction. They have been used in the past. They could be used in the future. And, in this nuclear age, the insane logic of mutually assured destruction will ensure that nothing survives, that none lives to tell the tale, that there is no one left to understand what went wrong and why.

There are those who argue that since the consequences of nuclear war are widely known and well understood, nuclear war just cannot happen. Neither experience nor logic can sustain such dangerous complacency. History is full of miscalculations. Perceptions are often totally at variance with reality. A madman's fantasy could unleash the end. An accident could trigger a chain reaction, which inexorably leads to doom. Indeed, the advance of technology has so reduced the time for decisions that, once activated, computers programmed for Armageddon pre-empt human intervention and all hope of survival. There

is, therefore, no comfort in the claim of the proponents of nuclear deterrence that everyone can be saved by ensuring that in the event of conflict, everyone will surely die.

The champions of nuclear deterrence argue that nuclear weapons have been invented and therefore, cannot be eliminated. We do not agree. We have an international convention eliminating biological weapons by prohibiting their use in war. We are working on similarly eliminating chemical weapons. There is no reason on principle why nuclear weapons too cannot be so eliminated. All it requires is the affirmation of certain basic moral values and the assertion of the required political will, underpinned by treaties and institutions, which insure against nuclear delinquency.

The past few years have seen the emergence of a new danger: the extension of the nuclear arms race into outer space. The ambition of creating impenetrable defences against nuclear weapons has merely escalated the arms race and complicated the process of disarmament. This has happened in spite of the grave doubts expressed by leading scientists about its very feasibility.

The new weapons being developed for defence against nuclear weapons are part of a much wider qualitative arms race. The development of the so-called "third generation nuclear weapons" has opened up ominous prospects of their being used for selective and discriminate military operations. There is nothing more dangerous than the illusion of limited nuclear war" It desensitizes inhibitions about the use of nuclear weapons. That could lead, in next to no time, to the outbreak of full-fledged nuclear war.

There are no technological solutions to the problems of world security. Security can only come from our asserting effective political control over this self-propelled technological arms race. We cannot accept the logic that a few nations have the right to pursue their security by threatening the survival of humankind. It is not only those who live by the nuclear sword who, by design or default, shall one day perish by it. All humanity will perish.

Nor is it acceptable that those who possess nuclear weapons are freed of all controls while those without nuclear weapons are policed against their production. History is full of such prejudices paraded as iron laws: that men are superior to women; that the white races are superior to the coloured; that colonialism is a civilizing mission; that those who possess nuclear weapons are responsible powers and those who do not are not.

Alas, nuclear weapons are not the only weapons of mass destruction. New knowledge is being generated in the life sciences. Military applications of these developments could

rapidly undermine the existing convention against the military use of biological weapons. The ambit of our concern must extend to all means of mass annihilation.

New technologies have also dramatically expanded the scope and intensity of conventional warfare. The physical destruction, which can be carried out by full-scale conventional war, would be enormous, far exceeding anything known in the past.

Those of us who do not belong to the military blocs would much rather stay out of the race. We do not want to accumulate arms. We do not want to augment our capacity to kill. But the system, like a whirlpool, sucks us into its vortex. We are compelled to divert resources from development to defence to respond to the arsenals, which are constructed as a sideshow to great power rivalries. As the nature and sophistication of threat to our security increase, we are forced to incur huge expenditure on raising the threshold of our defences.

Even the mightiest military powers realize that they cannot continue the present arms race without inviting economic calamity. The continuing arms race has imposed a great burden on national economies and the global economy. It is no longer only the developing countries who are using disarmament to channel resources to development. Even the richest are beginning to realize that they cannot afford the current levels of the military burden they have imposed upon themselves. A genuine process of disarmament, leading to a substantial reduction in military expenditure, is bound to promote the prosperity of all nations of the globe. **Disarmament accompanied by coexistence will open up opportunities for all countries**, whatever their socio-economic systems, whatever their levels of development.

The technological revolutions of our century have created unparalleled wealth. They have endowed the fortunate with high levels of mass consumption and widespread social welfare. In fact, there is plenty for everyone, provided distribution is made more equitable. Yet, the possibility of fulfilling the basic needs of nutrition and shelter, education and health remains beyond the reach of vast millions of people in the developing world because resources which could give fulfilment in life are pre-empted for death.

The root causes of global insecurity reach far below the calculus of military parity. They are related to the instability spawned by widespread poverty, squalor, hunger, disease and illiteracy. They are connected to the degradation of the environment. They are enmeshed in the inequity and injustice of the present world order. The effort to promote security for all must be underpinned by the effort to promote opportunity for all the equitable access to achievement. Comprehensive global security must rest on a new, more just, more honourable world order.

We have all welcomed the ratification of the INF Treaty concluded between General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan. It is an important step in the right direction. Its great value lies in its bold departure from nuclear arms limitation to nuclear disarmament. We hope there will be agreement soon to reduce strategic nuclear arsenals by 50 per cent. The process should be carried forward to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Only then will we be able to look back and say that the NF Treaty was a truly historic beginning. India believes it is possible for the human race to survive the second millennium. India believes it is also possible to ensure peace, security and survival into the third millennium and beyond. The way lies through concerted action. We urge the international community to immediately undertake negotiations with a view to adopting a time-bound Action Plan to usher in a world order free of nuclear weapons and rooted in non-violence.

We have submitted such an Action Plan to this Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly. The essential features of the Action Plan are:

- First, there should be a binding commitment by all nations to eliminating nuclear weapons in stages, by the year 2010 at the latest.
- Second, all nuclear weapon States must participate in the process of nuclear disarmament. All other countries must also be part of the process.
- Third, to demonstrate good faith and build the required confidence, there must be tangible progress at each stage towards the common goal.
- Fourth, changes are required in doctrines, policies and institutions to sustain a world free of nuclear weapons. Negotiations should be undertaken to establish a Comprehensive Global Security System under the aegis of the United Nations.

We propose simultaneous negotiations on a series of integrally related measures, But we do recognize the need for flexibility in the staging of some of these measures.

In Stage-1, the INF Treaty must be followed by a fifty per cent cut in Soviet and U.S. strategic arsenals. All production of nuclear weapons and weapons grade fissionable material must cease immediately. A moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons must be undertaken with immediate effect to set the stage for negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

We propose that negotiations must commence in the first stage itself for a new Treaty to replace the NPT which expires in 1995. This new Treaty should give legal effect to the binding commitment of Nuclear Weapons States to eliminate all nuclear weapons by the year 2010 and of all the Non-Nuclear Weapon States to not cross the nuclear weapons threshold.

The Plan for radical and comprehensive disarmament must be pursued along with efforts to create a new system of comprehensive global security. The components of such a system must be mutually supportive. Participation in it must be universal.

The structure of such a system should be firmly based on non-violence. When we eliminate nuclear weapons and reduce conventional forces to minimum defensive levels, the establishment of a non-violent world order is the only way of not relapsing into the irrationalities of the past. It is the only way of precluding the recommencement of an armaments spiral. Nonviolence in international relations cannot be considered a Utopian goal. It is the only available basis for civilised survival, for the maintenance of peace through peaceful coexistence, for a new, just, equitable and democratic world order. As Mahatma Gandhi said in the aftermath of the first use of nuclear weapons:

"The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter bombs, even as, violence cannot be destroyed by counter- violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. "

The new structure of international relations must be based on respect for various ideologies, on the right to pursue different socio-economic systems, and the celebration of diversity. Happily, this is already beginning to happen. Post-war bipolarity is giving way to a growing realisation of the need for coexistence. As Jawaharlal Nehru said:

"The alternative to co-existence is co-destruction."

Therefore, the new structure of international relations to sustain a world beyond nuclear weapons will have to be based on the principles of coexistence, the non-use of force, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, and the right of every state to pursue its own path of development. These principles are enshrined in the Chapter of the United Nations.

The battle for peace, disarmament and development must be waged both within this Assembly and outside by the peoples of the world. This battle should be waged in cooperation with scientists, strategic thinkers and leaders of peace movements who have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to those ideals. We, therefore, seek their cooperation in securing the commitment of all nations and all peoples to the goal of a non-violent world order free of nuclear weapons.