



"TALKING ABOUT NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT"

www.talkworks.info

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TalkWorks1>

Rebecca Johnson

Transcript of film recorded 26 February 2009

The abolition of nuclear weapons is an idea whose time has come, and the questions should not be whether, it should be when, and how. The when is, clearly, as soon as possible. The how is the difficult bit, that I think you'll find that you get different kinds of perspectives on.

I think that the WMD Commission that was chaired by Hans Blix got it absolutely right, that the technical issues, the verification issues, are all solvable: they will take time, but they can all be resolved. The key issue is the political determination and will to get rid of nuclear weapons, and I think to start we actually have to decide that we will never use them. We have to decide to outlaw them. Now traditionally, the nuclear architects in the Cold War said, well we have nuclear weapons to prevent them being used. But I think now we look at the world, we think that nuclear deterrence ain't what it used to be, and actually many of us think that it was more akin to voodoo, voodoo medicine, where the belief is part of what gave it power.

Deterrence theory by Britain and by NATO actually relies on potentially using nuclear weapons first in a conflict. And this can not now, the- there can be no possible justification for this, we have other kinds of means of resolving conflicts: we need to use other kinds of tools of deterrence, and I don't only mean military tools by the way. I think that a lot of the tools of deterrence are diplomatic and political. We need to work on those much more. So we actually need to take nuclear weapons out of deterrence altogether. We need a concept of deterrence that isn't nuclear deterrence, but is deterrence. And we need to stop referring to nuclear weapons as "our nuclear deterrent". These are not synonymous. A nuclear weapon is a weapon and a weapon of mass destruction, or as the Blix Commission said, it is a weapon of terror.

Now I argue that we need to deal with use, because at the moment there is no prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons. The International Court of Justice identified that in practically any scenario you could imagine, they would be contrary to international law, and - and humanitarian law, but they left a kind of little door open, which was "the very survival of the state". Now that's what we have to close, and we can close it. . And it is in the security and the peace and justice interests of all of us to close that loophole

And that's why I argue that the real step that keeps being missed by a lot of the thinkers on these issues who look into all the complexities of verification, very, very good work, but my point is that we need a kind of breathing space, a pre-

negotiations pause, and that pause to be created by the international community declaring nuclear weapons to be inhumane, declaring them a crime against humanity, and promising through the law that we will come to the aid of anyone threatened or attacked, and that we will hunt down and bring to justice, in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, anyone who is found guilty of perpetrating such a horrendous crime, or of supplying those who have perpetrated it.

I think we're in that situation where the governments want to be seen to be doing something, because proliferation is a major problem. But they don't, they haven't quite got to the point where they want to give up themselves. So the thing that makes it easier for them to say, "Well, it has to go very slowly", is to say the problems are enormous. I actually think in many ways, and for political reasons, the problems associated with the elimination, - the dismantling and the verification of, - the elimination of nuclear weapons, are being exaggerated at present. And I believe that if we actually got to the point where they definitely decided that they did not want to keep open the option of having nuclear weapons, they would then put the work into solving those problems, and I believe in fact those technical and political problems are more easily solved than currently realized - It's in their interests to present them as insuperable.

Of course, the grassroots and the activist movements have been talking about a nuclear weapon convention for some years, if not longer, but it's only recently when the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, put forward a five point plan at a meeting I was actually at, at the EastWest Institute in New York in October of 2008, that he in his first point there talked about a nuclear weapon convention being a way to get this job done, and reminded people that in fact the UN has a draft or a model with some very, very good ideas in it, that's been put forward by Costa Rica and Malaysia, and is in all the official UN languages.

I believe that we will see a nuclear weapon convention in my lifetime: a convention that makes the production the use, the acquisition, the deployment of nuclear weapons, completely illegal. I believe that, we could get that by 2020, and even before that we could have got nuclear weapons out of Europe and I don't just mean NATO nuclear weapons, which should just be withdrawn now, but the British and French as well. And that, by that time, even though there may be some nuclear weapons around, that there is the full acceptance that any nuclear weapons, that the use of any nuclear weapons, would be a crime against humanity, and any perpetrators would have committed a crime against humanity, and that these weapons do not have a role in power projection, they do not have a role in status, they do not have a role in deterrence or security. They have no role, no positive role in society at all, they are simply the outdated legacy of the Age of Terror of the Cold War.

I think we have to be cautious, not to believe that we are on an irrevocable journey towards nuclear disarmament. We need, there are a few more steps that we need to take before we get onto that irrevocable journey. On the other hand I think we are not very far away from really reaching that point of no return where nuclear weapons really become so utterly marginalized, that governments just put the resources into quickly solving all those elimination and verification problems.

END