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Message to the Framework Forum

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues surrounding nuclear weapons appear to be growing. As it stands we have countries that possess either the ready to use weapons or are well on their way to achieving that capability. Therefore, I would strongly argue that the time is now to push even harder for tangible solutions. With that being said I was asked to discuss a very important aspect of achieving said solutions and that is the role of Parliamentarians in building political traction for nonproliferation.

In preparing for this conference I evaluated many situations globally that are impacting, either negatively or positively, our goal of zero nuclear weapons. In doing so it became quite clear that there are two groups that exist. The first group, are those countries that are technologically advanced and are a strong conventional military power. The second are those countries which lack a strong conventional military and thus view nuclear weapons as a vital part to their security.

With this in mind we must evaluate and expand ideas on how to bring together a comprehensive and effective method for global security that will in turn eliminate the need for nuclear weapons all together. This of course is easier said than done, and with the ever looming presents of the active pursuit of nuclear weapons by terrorists, it seems even more farfetched. Thus, what is the solution, well it is obvious that a single fix all plan does not exist or I am sure we would be out trying to implement it.

The fact of the matter is that we must be patient and at the same time diligent in our pursuits.

There is a saying that complacency trumps anxiety and for the most part this is absolutely true when it comes to the topic of nuclear weapons. The United States of America is the only country to have used a nuclear weapon and that was almost 70 years ago. After that horrific event 8 countries followed with the production of nuclear weapons but have not used them. Further, when a tragedy occurs with a nuclear reactor such as the most resent event in Fukushima, a heated debate ensues as to the safety and necessity of nuclear energy, while stock piles of nuclear weapons sit at the wayside generating little or no public debate.

Therefore, one must wonder if the general public is waiting for another Hiroshima or Nagasaki before it will force its elected officials to take action. I strongly feel that this approach is a mistake and as the elected representatives of our citizens, is it not our responsibility to protect them from complacency, especially when it puts our lives at risk?

When I evaluated this topic, it occurred to me that while these meetings are important and serve as a platform for information and ideas we are sitting in a room amongst those who are already on board with the ideas being discussed here today. Thus, should we not be taking it upon ourselves as representatives of our constituents and respected members in this field, to pursue those who perhaps are of a different view regarding nuclear weapons?

As Mr. Ware and I discussed earlier this year, setting up secured sections or zones around the globe is a very viable and tangible solution and the way to accomplish this is through dialogue of the various regions in question. As a member of the European Parliament I find it tragic as well as counterproductive that 2 of our Member States have nuclear weapons. For Europe to be a leader in ridding the globe of nuclear weapons it is evident that these states need to realize that they are in a secured zone and there are no threats to them from other countries especially given the fact that they are not only members of the EU but also NATO as well as strong allies with the US.

It is my contention that with only a handful of exceptions, the current generation of political leaders show little interest in disarmament, and not much more in non-proliferation. And perhaps even more disappointing is that the public is not pressuring them to behave otherwise. As Mr. Tim McDonnell wrote in his report for the Wilson Center “By also taking into consideration that over the past decade there has been the development of a visible association between nuclear programs and national leaders’ personal fates it is clear that this will be a difficult pattern to break. Furthermore, if this association gains traction, this new, personal dimension to nuclear policies may in fact seriously debilitate our efforts to stop or slow countries such as Iran and North Korea’s nuclear programs”.

Mr. McDonnell is of course referencing to the cases of Iraq and Libya. Building political traction toward the goal of zero nuclear weapons seems to be in a conundrum of either there is little or no pressure to address the dangers of continuing to have nuclear weapons or in contrast, the ruthless pursuit of having nuclear weapons in an effort to save your own neck.

I would say that as Parliamentarians working in stable and democratic environments, we are at an advantage to significantly change these situations. We are able to address our constituents and our governments to begin dialogues and conversations with Countries in possession of nuclear weapons. Moreover, we have the ability to garner support from our colleagues both domestic and foreign. I had the opportunity to author a written declaration with Global Zero and the support that it received from the MEP’s was a clear signal that this issue is of great importance.

As Parliamentarians we are able to instigate situations of action as well as bringing to light difficult and important matters. This is where we are the most valuable. In 2011 after a private meeting with leading think-tank researchers and a worldwide cast of some 30 former foreign and defense ministers, generals, and ambassadors who share their concern and commitment on fighting against nuclear weapons, former British Defense Minister Des Browne stated: “People who used to be something really want to tackle this issue. The trouble is that those who are something don’t.”

I respectfully disagree with Mr. Browne and I think he would encourage that. We are doing “something”, it is something difficult and needs time, and trust in fellow man.

I thank you for your attention.