



The  
Elders

# **NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT**

POLICY PAPER



ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION



The Elders at their October 2018 Board Meeting in London.

## THE ELDERS

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**The Elders are a group of independent leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who use their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide.**

The Elders are deeply grateful to Gareth Evans -- Chancellor of the Australian National University, former Australian Foreign Minister, President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group and internationally-respected expert on nuclear weapons issues -- for his substantial support in developing and articulating their positions on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

**Mary Robinson**, Chair  
**Martti Ahtisaari**, Elder Emeritus  
**Ban Ki-moon**, Deputy Chair  
**Ela Bhatt**, Elder Emeritus  
**Lakhdar Brahimi**  
**Gro Harlem Brundtland**  
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**Juan Manuel Santos**  
**Desmond Tutu**, Elder Emeritus  
**Ernesto Zedillo**

**Kofi Annan** (1938-2018) was a founding member of The Elders and served as Chair from 2013-2018.

# CONTENTS

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- 4** The Elders and Nuclear Weapons
- 10** The Threat of Nuclear Weapons
- 12** Responding to Proponents of Nuclear Deterrence
- 18** A Realistic Agenda for Nuclear Arms Control
- 20** The Elders' Proposal for Nuclear Minimisation - The Four D's
- 23** Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
- 24** Nuclear Non-Proliferation
- 27** Conclusion

# THE ELDERS AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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As global leaders who previously held high offices with governments and international organisations around the world, the existentialist threat to humanity posed by nuclear weapons has always been present in the minds of the Elders, as individuals and as a group. All have thought long and hard about the implications for human security of the possession and proliferation of these “doomsday weapons”. Now, with the invaluable assistance of Gareth Evans, they have developed their collective public positions on how to lessen the grave risks at stake.

The founder of The Elders, **Nelson Mandela**, set the tone in September 1998 when, as President of South Africa, he used the podium of the annual UN General Assembly to issue a passionate call upon all member states to work towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, along with that other scourge, global poverty. Other Elders have followed where he led.

**Ernesto Zedillo** and **Gro Harlem Brundtland**, the former Mexican President and Norwegian Prime Minister, were both Commissioners in the 2009 International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), and **Lakhdar Brahimi**, the former Foreign Minister of Algeria, served as an Advisory Board member to the ICNND. **Ernesto Zedillo** was also the Chair of the 2007 Commission of Eminent Persons on the future of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The late **Kofi Annan**, The Elders’ Chair from 2012 to 2018, and **Ban Ki-moon**, his successor as UN Secretary-General, invested much time and energy in discussing disarmament with UN member states. Emeritus Elder **Jimmy Carter**, the 39th US President, had first-hand experience of the topic: as a nuclear submarine commander in the US Navy and later as the US military’s Commander-in-Chief from 1977-81. Emeritus Elder **Desmond Tutu**, The Elders’ first Chair from 2007 to 2012, has been actively involved in the humanitarian impact movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

# SUMMARY

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**The world today faces the dangerous prospect of a new nuclear arms race between the United States and Russia, with cascading effects on other nuclear states, many of which continue to modernise and expand their arsenals. Unlike in previous decades, when anti-nuclear movements had mass public support, there is limited public awareness of the existential threat that nuclear weapons continue to pose to humanity.**

For many years, it has been widely acknowledged that so long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them.

So long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used – if not by design, then by human error, miscalculation or misjudgement.

Any such use will be catastrophic for life on this planet as we know it.

For the very survival of humanity, nuclear weapons must never be used again, under any circumstances.

The only guarantee of the non-use of nuclear weapons is their complete abolition.

At a time of growing geopolitical tensions and rivalry, it is time for all nuclear powers to get serious about disarmament, and to act now to prevent unparalleled devastation.

These same tensions and rivalries, combined with the difficulty of crafting a fully enforceable ‘global zero’ treaty regime, mean it is not politically realistic to expect complete elimination of nuclear weapons any time soon.

This is why The Elders advocate a “minimisation” agenda to further the cause of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and safeguard peace and a liveable planet for future generations.

**It is time for all nuclear powers to get serious about disarmament, and to act now to prevent unparalleled devastation.**

# THE ELDERS' PROPOSAL FOR NUCLEAR MINIMISATION - THE FOUR D'S

1

## **Doctrine:**

Every nuclear-armed state should make an unequivocal "No First Use" (NFU) declaration

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2

## **De-alerting:**

The highest priority must be given to taking as many weapons as possible off their current high-alert status

3

## Deployment:

**More than one-quarter of the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons is currently operationally deployed. This proportion must be dramatically and urgently reduced.**

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4

## Decreased numbers:

**The number of nuclear warheads in existence should be reduced from 14,000 to around 2,000, with the US and Russia reducing to a total of no more than 500 each.\***

\*The proposed limitations on US and Russian stockpiles are in line with the minimum numbers for effective deterrence suggested in a 2010 study by the Strategic Plan and Policy Division of the US Air Force.



Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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**We must ask the question, which might sound naïve to those who have elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction – why do they need them anyway?**

**In reality, no rational answer can be advanced to explain what, in the end, is the consequence of Cold War inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force.**

President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, in a speech to the UN General Assembly on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1998.

# INTRODUCTION

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The world is now closer to nuclear catastrophe than at any time since the height of the Cold War. In 2018, the respected Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the hands of its Doomsday Clock to two minutes to midnight, where they were in 1953 during the Korean War and the first tests of hydrogen bombs by the United States and Soviet Union. This marks the closest to midnight in the Clock's history.

Despite big reductions since the end of the Cold War in 1991, some 14,000 nuclear warheads are still in existence. They have a combined destructive capability of close to 100,000 Hiroshima or Nagasaki-sized bombs; over 90% are in US and Russian hands. And, worryingly, a large proportion of the total – nearly 4,000 – remain operationally deployed.

Most disturbingly, nearly 2,000 of the US and Russian weapons remain on a dangerously high state of alert, ready to be launched in the event of a perceived attack within a “decision window” for each President of four to eight minutes.

Two-thirds of United Nations member states support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (the Nuclear Ban Treaty) passed by the UN General Assembly in July 2017. But, despite the recent efforts of many UN member states, all the present nuclear-armed states, and nearly all their partners and allies, vigorously oppose even tentative first steps toward disarmament.

Multilateral negotiations under UN auspices on nuclear disarmament have made little progress for decades. The same is true of the five-yearly NPT review conferences.

Regrettably, trends are in fact in the opposite direction. Recent doctrinal changes by nuclear powers, and indications that some nuclear states may pursue the development of tactical battlefield nuclear weapons, contribute to a sense that the long-standing taboo against the use of nuclear weapons is increasingly coming under threat. And in Asia, the number of nuclear weapons in existence has risen steadily since the end of the Cold War, fuelled particularly by significant increases in Indian and Pakistani nuclear stockpiles.

# THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

**So long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used - if not by design, then by human error, system error, miscalculation or misjudgement.**

The core nature of the nuclear threat can be very simply defined. So long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them.

So long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used - if not by design, then by human error, system error, miscalculation or misjudgement. And any such use will be catastrophic for life on this planet as we know it.

In the last five years, these long-standing conclusions have been reinforced and updated with the campaign to highlight the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons.

No country individually, nor the international system collectively, has the capacity to cope with the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. For the very survival of humanity, nuclear weapons must never be used again, under any circumstances. The only guarantee of the non-use of nuclear weapons is their complete abolition.

Over the years, communications satellite launches have been mistaken for nuclear missile launches; military exercises have been mistaken for real mobilisation; technical glitches have triggered real-time alerts; and live nuclear weapons have been flown by mistake around the US. One hydrogen bomb-carrying plane actually crashed in the US, with every safety mechanism preventing an explosion failing, except for one cockpit switch.



A nuclear device is detonated at Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1952.  
Photo: US Government

Given this dismal record, the fact that the world has survived for over seven decades without a nuclear weapons catastrophe is not a matter of inherent system stability or great statesmanship. It has been just sheer luck.

As bad as the risks were during the Cold War years, when there were just two opposing major nuclear powers, these have become dramatically compounded since the proliferation that has resulted in India, Pakistan, Israel and, more recently, North Korea also becoming nuclear armed states. All four states share certain worrying features: they inhabit areas of great regional volatility; have a history of violent conflict; and lack the command-and-control sophistication, military-to-military communication systems, and the practice of regular strategic nuclear policy dialogues which exist between the major powers.

These existing risks would be compounded dramatically were there to be further proliferation breakouts, particularly in the Middle East or in North East Asia. Fortunately, though, in recent decades bilateral and multilateral efforts to wean states intent on pursuing the nuclear weapons path, for instance Iran, Libya, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina, off the path have staunched the flow of nuclear weapons components and technology.

Then there are the risks of non-state terrorist groups getting their hands on ill-secured nuclear weapons or dangerous nuclear material. The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the scattering of former Soviet nuclear facilities across several fragile, newly independent states has led to heightened fears – and concerted international efforts to counter the threat – in this regard.

# RESPONDING TO PROponents OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The standard answer to any articulation of the risks associated with nuclear weapons possession is that while downsides might exist, these are outweighed by strategic rewards.

The key argument for the possession of nuclear weapons is that they have deterred, and continue to deter, war between the major powers and large-scale conventional attacks. It is also argued that ending the extended nuclear deterrence on which as many as 40 US allies and partners rely would be destabilising and could result in further nuclear proliferation.

**In The Elders' view, the robustness and credibility of this enduring logic, which has mainly gone unchallenged, is flawed.**

Our challenge to the conventional wisdom has four dimensions: the weakness of the deterrence argument, the implications for non-proliferation, the financial cost, and the humanitarian imperative.

## **i. Deterrence**

While possession of nuclear weapons by a potential adversary has always made a formidable case for treating such an adversary with caution, **The Elders believe their deterrent value has been significantly overstated.**

There is simply no evidence for instance that, at any stage during the Cold War years, either the Soviet Union or the United States ever wanted to cold-bloodedly initiate war, and were only constrained from doing so by the existence of the other's nuclear weapons. And a plausible case can be made that the United States and Soviet Union were constrained less by specific fears about the other's nuclear capabilities as by the recognition, in light of the devastation caused by the Second World War, that any conflict between the two powers would inevitably be immensely destructive and far more costly than any conceivable benefits that could be obtained from it.

## **The idea that possession of nuclear weapons can immunise countries from conventional assault is not supported by historical evidence.**

While some countries – Pakistan for example – may view nuclear weapons as a “strategic equaliser” that can mitigate relative conventional military weaknesses and as symbols of national prestige, the idea that possession of nuclear weapons can immunise countries from conventional assault is not supported by historical evidence. The taboo against the use of nuclear weapons has been so strong that it has been difficult in practice for countries to use, or even threaten to use, these weapons to protect themselves from conventional assault. For instance, there was no serious possibility of the United Kingdom invoking nuclear threats to deter Argentina from invading the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) in 1982, or to blackmail Argentina into withdrawal after the invasion, despite the UK government’s determination to respond with military force.

**Far from increasing global stability, in The Elders’ judgement the existence of nuclear weapons has often injected an additional degree of threat and instability into already volatile situations, most notably on the Korean Peninsula and in the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.**

In some cases, the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides could be argued to have even facilitated small-scale military actions, giving one side the opportunity to launch attacks without serious fear of reprisal, because the potential risks of military escalation by their adversaries would have been so extreme. This was arguably the case with Pakistan in the Kargil region on the Indian side of the Line of Control in Kashmir in 1999, and North Korea over the sinking of South Korea’s Cheonan naval vessel and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. (While South Korea does not possess nuclear weapons, it is protected by treaty by the US nuclear “umbrella” over its territory.)



## ii. Non-Proliferation

It is very difficult for arguments in favour of nuclear deterrence to avoid transparent double standards. After all, if nuclear weapons are such a great stabiliser, why should not more countries have them? If US and Russian nuclear weapons help to stabilise global security, then by this logic the possession of nuclear weapons by a second country in the region will help to stabilise the Middle East.

The hypocrisy that results from arguing fervently in favour of

maintaining existing nuclear stockpiles while opposing further nuclear proliferation is thus in itself a significant obstacle to non-proliferation efforts.

**The Elders firmly believe that strengthening the existing non-proliferation regime will be extremely difficult in the absence of significant progress towards elimination by nuclear states.**

In the long term, further nuclear proliferation is extremely likely to occur so long as nuclear weapons remain in existence.

**The hypocrisy that results from arguing fervently in favour of maintaining existing nuclear stockpiles while opposing further nuclear proliferation is a significant obstacle to non-proliferation efforts.**



The Elders' delegation to Moscow (left) led by Kofi Annan, meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in April 2015.  
Photo: Grigory Sysoev / The Elders

### iii. Financial Cost

Not only are the strategic arguments for nuclear possession flimsy, but the staggering cost of these weapons makes their continued existence even harder to justify.

In 2011, Global Zero<sup>1</sup> researchers Bruce Blair and Matthew Brown estimated the full annual cost of worldwide spending on nuclear weapons at US\$104.9 billion and forecast that spending over the following decade would exceed one trillion dollars.

These figures are now dwarfed by the more than one trillion dollars that the United States alone has said it will spend on modernising its own nuclear arsenal over the next three decades. In response to the apparent return of a nuclear arms race between major powers, President Vladimir Putin has declared that Russia will match the United States step-for-step.

It has been estimated<sup>2</sup> that the US\$1 trillion the US is planning to spend could cover all of the following:

- o Feed all 780 million malnourished people in the world for ten years;
- o Build up to 100 million new homes in developing countries;
- o Provide ART drugs for all the 28 million people in Africa infected with HIV;
- o Fund a year's salary for up to 10 million teachers in developing countries;
- o Provide tuition for 200,000 students for five years each at top US universities;
- o Massively fund renewable energy provision worldwide,
- o and still have money to spare.

**Given the scale of humanitarian and development needs the planet is facing, in The Elders' opinion this is an unjustifiable and unsustainable squandering of resources.**

<sup>1</sup>An international, non-partisan group of 300 world leaders dedicated to eliminating nuclear weapons.

<sup>2</sup>Move The Nuclear Weapons Money Campaign: [www.nuclearweaponsmoney.org/opportunity-costs](http://www.nuclearweaponsmoney.org/opportunity-costs)



Martti Ahtisaari, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Mary Robinson and Jimmy Carter with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea, Ri Yong Ho during a visit to North Korea in April 2011.  
Photo: Richard Lewis | The Elders

#### **iv. Moral Unacceptability**

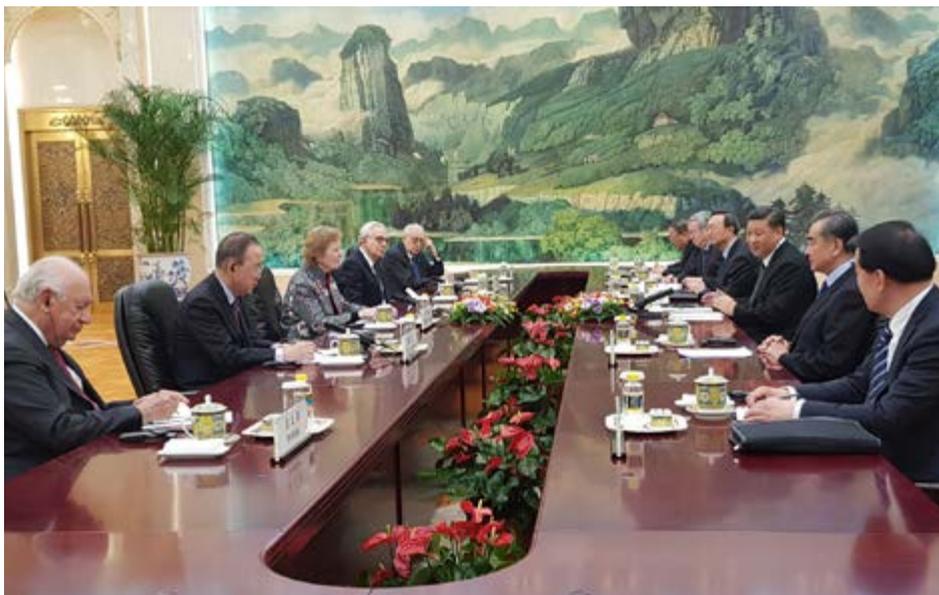
When the first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, it made no distinction between combatants and civilians, old and young, or victims and the first responders trying to help them. Virtually all those within a half kilometre radius were incinerated, boiled or crushed to death. Those in surrounding areas died soon after of terrible burns and wounds or later of radiation illness.

Concealed by the language of deterrence, doctrine, warhead reliability and the like, the moral and humanitarian bottom line is the terrible, indiscriminate human suffering these weapons cause.

**The moral and humanitarian bottom line is the terrible, indiscriminate human suffering these weapons cause.**



Kofi Annan meets Iranian President Rouhani during an Elders visit to the country in January 2014.  
Photo: Morteza Nikoubazl / The Elders



The Elders meet with China's President Xi Jinping and other senior leaders in Beijing, China in April 2019.

# A REALISTIC AGENDA FOR NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL

**In The Elders' view, the nuclear threat will continue to hang over the world until the last nuclear-armed state destroys its last weapon, and the world has to get serious, now, about movement towards that objective.**

It is misleading and self-serving to suggest that because nuclear weapons cannot be “un-invented”, they are destined to always exist. While they cannot be “un-invented”, they can be outlawed, as chemical and biological weapons have been. The end-point for global campaigning must be nothing less than the comprehensive outlawing of nuclear weapons.

**The Elders support the Nuclear Ban Treaty, which is on its way to entering into force once it has been ratified by 50 signatory states.** The decision of the Nobel Prize Committee to award the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), one of the driving forces behind the Treaty, its Peace Prize in 2017 indicates the important impact this campaign has had on the global debate surrounding nuclear weapons.

By seeking to ban outright the development, possession, use, threat of use, stationing or transfer of all nuclear weapons, the Treaty has generated real, normative momentum and made clear that the great majority of UN member states regard nuclear weapons as morally unconscionable and legally dubious. They want to see them completely prohibited.

However, it must also be highlighted that no nuclear armed states, or their allies or treaty partners, have joined the draft treaty, or are likely to for the indefinitely foreseeable future. The Ban Treaty contains no effective mechanism for verification and enforcement of a ‘global zero’ world, and is widely acknowledged to be aspirational rather than practically operational in character.

While The Elders support the aims of the Nuclear Ban Treaty, the reality is that nuclear weapons elimination is only ever going to be achievable on an incremental basis.

**What is required now, in The Elders' opinion, is therefore a realistic step-by-step agenda, which focuses on getting buy-in not just from those governments already wedded to the disarmament goal but from all governments – including all the nuclear armed states** and their allies. That means, for the medium term, focusing on minimisation, to be followed eventually by the elimination of nuclear weapons as the ultimate end goal.<sup>3</sup>

**While nuclear weapons cannot be “un-invented”, they can be outlawed, as chemical and biological weapons have been.**

<sup>3</sup>As outlined in the 2009 report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*

A nuclear weapon is  
detonated at Bikini Atoll in  
the Marshall Islands in 1946.  
Photo: US Government



# THE ELDERS' PROPOSALS FOR NUCLEAR MINIMISATION – THE FOUR D'S

The Elders propose four key components to a nuclear-minimisation objective:

**1 Doctrine:** Every nuclear-armed state should make an unequivocal “No First Use” (NFU) declaration, committing itself not to use nuclear weapons either preventively or pre-emptively against any adversary, or even reactively against non-nuclear attacks. If not prepared to make such a declaration, every nuclear state should accept the principle that the sole purpose of possessing nuclear weapons – until such time as they can be eliminated completely – is to deter others from using such weapons against that state or its treaty allies.

**2 De-alerting:** With some 2,000 US and Russian weapons remaining on a dangerously high state of alert – ready to be launched within minutes of receiving information (or misinformation) about an opponent's attack – the risk remains very high of nuclear war being triggered by accidental or unauthorised launches. The prospect of human or system error

is an omnipresent reality, with the risk compounded by the prospect of cyber sabotage of communications systems. **The highest priority must therefore be given to taking as many weapons as possible off their high-alert status.**

**3 Deployment:** With over a quarter of the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons operationally deployed, an important “way-station” should be to drastically reduce that number. Regardless of the regrettable US and Russian decisions to suspend participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, **extension of the US-Russia New START treaty, which reduces the number of each side's deployed strategic weapons and is due to expire in 2021, is a crucial next step.** So long as nuclear weapons exist, it is probably unavoidable that states will want to retain demonstrably survivable retaliatory forces, with some weapons kept intact and useable at short notice.



Ernesto Zedillo, Lakhdar Brahimi and Jimmy Carter greeted by US Secretary of State John Kerry at the State Department in Washington DC in July 2013. Photo: Molly Riley / The Elders

But in a world serious about moving to nuclear disarmament **it ought to be possible for the great majority of nuclear weapons to be not only moth-balled, but at least partially dismantled** as well.

#### **4 Decreased numbers:**

**The number of nuclear warheads in existence should be reduced from 14,000 to around 2,000, with the US and Russia reducing to a total of no more than 500 each, and no increase in the arsenals of the other nuclear states.** Ideally, there should be significant, matching reductions. US and Russian leadership is, however, crucial. Given that they hold 92% of the world's arsenal, without massive cuts by them, there is little prospect others will show restraint. Even if the US and Russia believe in the value of nuclear deterrence, it can be maintained with much lower numbers than at present.

A 2010 study by the Strategic Plan and Policy Division of the US Air Force has estimated that effective nuclear deterrence could be achieved with as few as 311 nuclear warheads, demonstrating that the proposed reductions are eminently achievable if US and Russian leaders are willing to demonstrate the necessary political will to do so.

A world with very low numbers of nuclear weapons, with very few deployed and practically none on high-alert launch status, and with every nuclear-armed state committed to never being the first to use these weapons, would still be very far from being perfect. No-one should even think of settling for that as the end-point.

But a world that achieved these objectives would be very much safer than it is now.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial, also known as the Atomic Bomb Dome, is located in Hiroshima, Japan close to where the first atomic bomb was dropped in August 1945.



**The challenges to achieving the final elimination of nuclear weapons are daunting and will require significant amounts of political will. But this is not a reason for despair.**

## **ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

**While it is desirable that nuclear states agree a concrete timetable for nuclear minimisation, The Elders recognise that a comparable timeline for elimination is less realistic.**

Elimination will be perceived by all relevant players as not just further steps in the same game, but a different game entirely. It will prove very hard to persuade states in dangerous regions like South Asia, North East Asia and the Middle East to give up their nuclear weapons without prior major reductions in the US and Russian stockpiles, and unless and until the underlying tensions in those regions are resolved.

Every nuclear-armed state will thus have to be persuaded that verification and – above all – enforcement arrangements are in place which will ensure absolutely that no state will be able to rearm without being detected in ample time, and that it can be stopped from going further.

The challenges to achieving the final elimination of nuclear weapons are daunting and will require significant amounts of political will and creative solutions to accomplish. But this is not a reason for despair.

Just as pessimism can feed on itself, so too can positive developments be self-reinforcing and become a virtuous circle. **What seems unthinkable now is likely to seem much more achievable 10 years from now if the “minimisation agenda” being proposed by The Elders develops real momentum.**

# NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION

Minimisation and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons must remain the priority, not only in their own right but as essential prerequisites for preventing the further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

However, simultaneous efforts to strengthen the non-proliferation regime remain useful. Measures we support include:

- Increasing safeguards to track the flow of materials inside civil reactors;
- Introducing real penalties for countries that withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT);
- Strengthening the capacity of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); and
- Finally, ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and bringing to conclusion the long-proposed Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.



Paper cranes are a symbol of the peace movement, in memory of Sadako Sasaki, a child who succumbed to leukemia ten years after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Photo: ICAN | Ari Beser

It is important for states to maintain a hard-headed but pragmatic approach to dealing with the specific nuclear proliferation threat posed by Iran. The **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** agreement reached between Iran and the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the European Union in 2015 remains an instructive model on how to secure multilateral agreements in this field, which could also provide useful lessons for dealing with North Korea's nuclear programme (although unlike Iran, North Korea is now a de facto nuclear state).

In dealing with nuclear proliferation threats such as that posed by Iran, it is important not to make the best the enemy of the good, and for policymakers to be willing to make concessions if these can lead to the elimination or significant reduction of the nuclear threat posed by specific countries. In this regard, it is deeply regrettable that the United States government decided to unilaterally withdraw from the JCPOA in May 2018, a development which risks undermining non-proliferation efforts both in the Middle East and at a global level.

A girl prepares to release a paper lantern on the Motoyasu river in remembrance of atomic bomb victims on the 64th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.  
Photo: REUTERS/Issei Kato



# CONCLUSION

A nuclear-minimisation agenda which implicitly accepts the continued existence of nuclear weapons over the medium-term is far from ideal. However, it appears to be the most likely agenda to achieve real progress, create a safer world, and maximise the possibility for nuclear weapons to be eliminated in the future.

The challenges to achieving a nuclear-free world will undoubtedly be significant and daunting, regardless of whether the agenda proposed by The Elders is adopted by nuclear states. But the costs to humanity of failing to move in this direction will be unimaginable.

This is why all states must urgently and seriously recognise the need for nuclear disarmament and must not cease until all nuclear weapons are removed from existence.

“ **The Elders can speak freely and boldly,  
working both publicly and behind the scenes.**

**They will reach out to those who most need  
their help.**

**They will support courage where there is fear,  
foster agreement where there is conflict and  
inspire hope where there is despair.**

**Nelson Mandela, 2007, Founder of The Elders**

The Elders are grateful to the individuals, trusts and foundations on their Advisory Council, whose support and advice allows them to carry out their work. Further information is available on The Elders' website.



**theElders.org**

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Registered charity in England and Wales. Reg. No. 1132397

Published in November 2019 > Designed by coastline.agency



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