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# Open Letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown

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## Open Letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown

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**Dear Prime Minister,**

On 21 January 2008, before the Chamber of Commerce of Delhi, you gave a speech that was exceptionally important. Since you expressed a wish for active cooperation from NGOs and other civil society groups, please allow us to express publicly our reaction to your fine speech.

Among the numerous challenges which humanity must face and which your speech outlined, there is one that has preoccupied our association since its foundation in 1996: the inherent danger of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. On this point you were absolutely right to emphasize the fact that: *"Now the world is not properly equipped ... to respond, as we must, to the spread of weapons of mass destruction"*. You then added (speaking to Indians in the first instance, but also to an international audience): *"Facing serious challenges from Iran and North Korea, we must send a powerful signal to all members of the international community that the race for more and bigger stockpiles of nuclear destruction is over. The expiry of the remaining US-Russia arms deals, the continued existence of these large arsenals, the stalemates on a fissile material cut-off treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty must all be addressed"*.

In saying this, you announced that the United Kingdom was ready to bring her *"expertise"* to bear, *"to help determine the requirements for the verifiable elimination of nuclear warheads."*

Last but not least, you promised that *"in the run-up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in 2010 we will be at the forefront of the international campaign to accelerate disarmament amongst possessor states, and to ultimately achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons."*

We would like to believe in this promise, which could be the start of a decisive turning in the history of the nuclear age. In making it, you have taken up the torch first held aloft by Mikhail Gorbachev in January 1986, when he launched the slogan: "No more nuclear weapons by the year 2000!"

This is what has made us take seriously your Delhi speech and caused us, as soon as we heard of it, to point out its importance to our colleagues in the global *"Abolition 2000"* network, one of those civil society networks which you say are capable of intervention, and one specifically dedicated to the abolition of nuclear arms.

It is strange that your speech has so far been met with scepticism by many of our Anglo-Saxon friends, including British citizens. The future will tell whether they are right. But does one need to be naïve and French to believe still in promises made by a leader of "perfidious Albion"? Did you recruit your supporters on our side of the Channel? No, that is unimportant. We prefer to stick with our naivety - at least until the meeting of the NPT Preparatory Committee in Geneva from 28 April to 9 May 2008.

Geneva is where history awaits you, Mr Brown, where the UK will have the chance to prove the worth of the promise you made in Delhi on 21 January, two days before the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, exhorted the Disarmament Conference in Geneva to break out of the impasse, saying: *"Disarmament and non-proliferation are closely associated with the very mission of the United Nations. They are widely recognized as indispensable to achieving the maintenance of international peace and security, a core principle in the UN Charter."*

So, either at the Disarmament Conference or at the Preparatory Committee for the 8th revision conference of the NPT, the United Kingdom has the opportunity to prove quickly in action her determination to implement Article VI of the NPT. This can lead the other nuclear states to finally negotiate the steps and the means - notably the

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"requirements for the verifiable elimination of nuclear warheads" - of a plan for eliminating their arsenals, it being understood that this plan will have to include and involve such de facto nuclear states as Israel, India, Pakistan or North Korea.

Like you, we think that this would give a strong signal to those non-nuclear states who are tempted (as Iran perhaps is) to attain the status of nuclear powers. We hope that in such a circumstance France would join Britain. The freezing of modernization programmes for their respective arsenals - the replacement of your Tridents, the development of France's M51 for example - would give credibility to this step, without in any way prejudging the results of subsequent negotiations.

We are delighted also that the United Kingdom wants to work for conventional disarmament in parallel with nuclear disarmament.

Permit us, nevertheless, to raise a few questions which we are not the only people to ask:

1. You say that you want « *to ultimately achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons* ».

â€" > When do you envisage this being ultimately achieved? If it's not Saint Yonx's Day or the Last Judgement, do you mean a date similar to that advanced by « *Mayors for Peace* »: namely 2020 ?

2. Noting across the world an « *increased interest in civil nuclear power* », you remark that this « *carries a risk of proliferation for military purposes* ». This is an opinion widely held, notably by the director of the IAEA. And yet the IAEA has been unable to hold these risks in check, as we see in the cases of North Korea and Iran, not to mention Israel, India and Pakistan.

â€" > What sort of « *undertaking concerning uranium enrichment* » do you propose to make to non-nuclear states, and how do you think you will be able to gain from them (and later verify) « *firm undertakings by these countries to respect the strictest norms of military non-proliferation* »?

3. Underlining the urgent need to combat climate change and environmental degradation, you propose to create a fund for the « *sustainable development* » of developing countries. This idea, which our association supports, has already been put forward and defined by the Abolition 2000 network and by Mr Gorbachev.

â€" > Would you be in favour of the UN relieving the IAEA of its mission to promote non-military nuclear technology and diverting the funds partly to its mission of control - which would be extended to nuclear disarmament - and partly to a new UN agency devoted to promoting renewable energy forms and energy saving?

-4. Nuclear energy, despite its partisans' wrongly presenting it as a means to combat global warming, is manifestly incompatible with « *sustainable development* »: it is not sustainable, since uranium ore will be exhausted in a matter of decades; and it contributes seriously - and eternally - to the degradation of public health and of the environment through its radioactive effects, its waste products which nobody knows how to dispose of, its accident risks, and the risks linked to terrorism.

â€" > Would you be ready to support the solution that would cut through the Gordian knot of military and civilian nuclearism: renunciation by all states that do not yet have nuclear energy, and an organised exit from nuclear technology - both military and civilian - for all the others (including France and the UK)?

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In 2006, attempting to contribute to a peaceful solution to the Iran crisis, we submitted this solution to Iran's Ambassador in Paris and then to the Iranian diplomatic delegation that took part in the RID-NBC conference (Rally for International Disarmament - Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) which our association has organised every two years since 2004 with the city of Saintes.

The third RID-NBC will take place in Saintes on 9-11 May 2008. All the questions raised above, and some others, will be publicly discussed here by experts, personalities, diplomats and activists of the international movement for the abolition of nuclear arms, who would certainly be ready to support you in their own countries if the intentions which you spoke of in Delhi were to be confirmed in the next three months.

For these reasons, in the name of our association and with the consent of Madame the mayor of Saintes (who will soon send you an official invitation) I have the honour of inviting you to the 3rd RID-NBC, or, if you cannot speak in person, to authorise a representative of your government to expound here the United Kingdom's proposals in the matter of nuclear, biological, chemical and conventional disarmament.

Please accept, Prime Minister, our respectful good wishes.

*Saintes, 1 February 2008*

**For ACDN France,**

**Jean-Marie Matagne, President**

### **Open Letter to**

- ▶ **Mr Gordon Brown**
  - ▶ **Prime Minister**
  - ▶ **10, Downing Street**
  - ▶ **London**
  - ▶ **United Kingdom**
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*PS:*

**CD Report**  
**5 February 2008**

Secretary of Defence for the United Kingdom, Des Brown, addressed the Conference on Disarmament (CD) this morning, putting forward a proposal on verification for nuclear disarmament and outlining the UK's position on several key issues facing the CD. The plenary also heard from representatives of Switzerland, Iran, Germany, Norway, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, and from the CD Secretary General, Sergei Ordzhonikidze.

Acknowledging that "it is rare for a defence Minister to address a conference on disarmament," Mr. Brown explained the UK wanted to send "a strong message about the priority" it gives to disarmament commitments.

Touching briefly on the issue of conventional weapons, Mr. Brown highlighted the UK's support of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Arms Trade Treaty initiative. He also indicated his commitment to "securing an international instrument that bans those cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians." He explained that he withdrew from service two types of cluster munitions last year, and has been meeting with NGOs and diplomats to discuss addressing cluster munitions through the Oslo Process and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

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Mr. Brown's statement focused on nuclear issues, however, emphasizing, "if we are serious about doing our bit to create the conditions for complete nuclear disarmament, we must now also begin to build deeper technical relationships on disarmament between nuclear states." He announced that the UK is willing to "host a technical conference of P5 nuclear laboratories on the verification of nuclear disarmament before the next NPT Review Conference in 2010," to "reinforce a process of mutual confidence building."

He highlighted a technical cooperation initiative that the UK's Atomic Weapons Establishment has developed in conjunction with several Norwegian defence laboratories and stated his wish to see the UK as "a role model and testing ground for measures that we and others can take on key aspect of disarmament. In particular, measures needed to determine the requirements for the verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons." This is not the first foray that the UK government has made into verification research, as it once conducted a three-part study that looked at the authentication of warheads and their components, and verification technologies and their potential uses in warhead dismantlement, the final results of which were presented at the 2005 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference.

Mr. Brown acknowledged cuts to warheads and stocks by Russia, the United States, the UK, and France, and urged increased transparency of these reductions. He also welcomed the "ongoing bilateral discussions between Russia and the United States for a follow-on arrangement" to START. He also emphasized the relationship between disarmament and non-proliferation, arguing, "Although, we all understand that there is no formal conditionality between progress on disarmament and non-proliferation, our goal should be a virtuous circle, where progress on one reinforces the other." Ambassador Bente Angell-Hansen of Norway agreed with this assessment, saying, "substantial progress on disarmament is vital to ensure further progress on non-proliferation as well."

Mr. Brown also argued that securing a fissile materials cut-off treaty (FMCT) is "a key milestone towards building this climate for disarmament," and said he would like to see "political commitment transformed into a legal one through a treaty." Switzerland's Ambassador Jürg Streuli echoed this view, stating that "such a mandate is of the utmost importance" and is the issue that is the "most ripe for negotiation". The representatives of Norway and Germany agreed, with Germany's Ambassador Bernhard Brasack arguing that the decision to start negotiations must be the "clear goal this year" and "an opportunity and priority that waits to be seized as the next logical step after the CTBT," and Norway's Ambassador Angell-Hansen advocating that governments "put short term security considerations aside and embark on a joint mission so that we can turn back the hand of the Doomsday Clock." Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan, however, indicated that any mandate to negotiate a fissile materials treaty must include discussion on the scope of the possible treaty, and the ability to talk about existing fissile materials stocks.

Regarding the Conference's work more generally, Iran's Ambassador Ali Reza Moaiyeri argued, "the efforts to resume the work of the CD on one priority should not be done at the cost of the others," pointing out, "There are different proposals from the previous years," which "are important and can be helpful in our collective endeavours." Germany's Ambassador Brasack remarked, "our key task is to ensure security on the basis of jointly defined global norms and through cooperation rather than isolation and confrontation. Today, more than ever, our maxim must be: security is indivisible."

Referring to the NPT as "more than a mere instrument for combating proliferation," Ambassador Brasack argued, "the possession of nuclear weapons by states outside the NPT risks undermining all non-proliferation and disarmament efforts," and called on states not yet party to the NPT to "accede unconditionally to the NPT." Ambassador Brasack also expressed his concern "that even some members of the NPT have given reason for doubts as to their commitment to the NPT," and his regret that the Review Conference of the NPT in 2005 "was unable to agree on" a substantive final document." He said he hopes the second Preparatory Committee in April-May 2008 will "jumpstart into substantial discussions and proposals without any delay."

For the first time this year, Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Secretary General of the CD, took the floor. He discussed the democratic nature of the UN and recalled the true goals of the CD, stating that "consensus is good, but it is not our final end. Our final end is strategic disarmament."

It is obvious that the Conference has not arrived at a consensus for a programme of work, however, the President, Ambassador Samir Labidi of Tunisia, stated that it should not prevent the Conference from continuing its work to "narrow differences". He also announced the seven coordinators\* to lead discussion and debates on the agenda items in informal sessions. The Conference also saw the inclusion of Denmark as an observer.

The next plenary meeting will be on Thursday, 7 February at 11am and will include an address by Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration of the United States, Thomas D'Agostino.

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-Sandra Fong, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom