

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons In Vienna

October 29, 2014

Susan Rice, National Security Advisor

John F. Kerry, Secretary of State

Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Defense

CC: Undersecretary Rose Gottemoeller; Amb. Adam Scheinman

Dear Ambassador Rice, Secretary Kerry, and Secretary Hagel:

We are writing to strongly urge you to authorize U.S. participation in the Dec. 8-9 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, Austria.

U.S. participation at would enhance the United States' credibility and influence at the 2015 NPT Review Conference. U.S. participation would also provide support to key U.S. allies and partners, many of which are also urging you to send an official delegation.

The conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons are a useful and important venue for raising awareness about the risks of nuclear weapons. They complement efforts to advance the action plan in the 2010 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference final document, many parts of which remain unfulfilled.

Furthermore, the conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons contribute to advancing the oft-repeated U.S. government call for "extending the nearly 70-year record of non-use of nuclear weapons forever."

Contrary to what some of your advisors may allege or fear, the conference is **not** the start of a diplomatic process for a ban on nuclear weapons or a convention on the elimination of nuclear weapons.

While some participating states and some nongovernmental organizations support such a ban and the negotiation of such a convention, this conference is not a negotiating conference and is not intended or designed to launch such an effort. Even if it were, there is no clear consensus among the participants about the direction of any such process.

Rather, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons is intended and designed to highlight the health and environmental dangers of nuclear weapons use, nuclear testing, and nuclear weapons production, and to underscore the urgency for progress on the NPT action plan.

The public and the private comments of key officials from the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the official agenda of the conference make this clear.

Some U.S. officials and officials from some of the other NPT nuclear weapon states have suggested this two-day conference would "distract from the practical agenda set forth in the 2010 NPT Action Plan."

Such assertions are wholly unconvincing and counterproductive. In fact, the United States would be well served to be associated with those states that support faster progress on the

NPT action plan and further efforts to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

We strongly believe that all five NPT nuclear weapon states should actively participate in the conference and support joint statements warning of the consequences of nuclear weapons use.

While the leaders of some states, such as Russia and France, may believe it is their national interest to boycott opportunities to engage with other states on this topic that should not be the attitude of the United States government. As President Obama said in June 2013 in Berlin:

*[S]o long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe. Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons, no matter how distant that dream may be. Complacency is not in the character of great nations.*

A decision on the part of the Obama administration not to attend the Vienna conference would be a major lost opportunity and a setback for President Obama's own call for action toward a nuclear weapons free world.

Sincerely,

James Acton, Co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program and Senior Associate,  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace\*

Barry M. Blechman,  
Co-founder, Stimson Center\*

Angela Canterbury, Executive Director,  
Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation and Council for a Livable World

David Cortright, Associate Director of Programs and Policy Studies,  
Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame\*

David Culp, Legislative Representative,  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Marie Dennis, Co-President,  
Pax Christi International

Charles D. Ferguson, Ph.D., President  
Federation of American Scientists\*

James E. Goodby, former U.S. negotiator on arms control, nonproliferation, and transparency issues

Robert Grey, former U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Ira Helfand, MD, Co-President,  
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Susan T. Henry-Crowe, MDiv.DD, General Secretary,  
General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church

Edward Ifft, Adjunct Professor, Security Studies Program,  
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Catherine Thomasson, MD, Executive Director,  
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Paul F. Walker, Ph.D.  
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