

With 20/20 Foresight, Mayors Around the World Join to End Nuclear War
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Will 2007 be remembered as the year the world turned its back on nuclear weapons? If so, the remarkable Jan. 4 editorial-page commentary ("A World Free of Nuclear Weapons 1" by George P. Shultz, Henry A. Kissinger, William J. Perry and Sam Nunn may be pinpointed as the day the great change began.

Their joint piece is remarkable not so much for its content -- the list of those who have proposed essentially the same ideas could be extended far beyond the few excellent examples they cite -- but because of the evident determination to underscore the nonpartisan nature of their abolitionist stance.

Steering the world away from nuclear catastrophe toward a nuclear-free future is not and must never be a political ax used by one faction against another. If humanity cannot unify behind this objective, then Hiroshima and Nagasaki will not remain much longer the only two victims of nuclear attack. It is important to recognize that support for the abolition of nuclear weapons is not the idiosyncratic position of a small circle. A March 2005 AP poll demonstrated that the great majority of Americans support global nuclear disarmament. With the greatest respect, I would like to offer the following constructive amendment to the above commentary: I am president of an international network of cities known as Mayors for Peace. Our 1,553 members come from 120 countries and a wide range of political persuasions. Our organization had the single largest delegation, governmental or non-governmental, at the last nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference where we advanced what we call the 2020 Vision: that all efforts should be bent toward ridding the world of nuclear weapons by the year 2020.

We selected this date specifically because the goal is quite feasible. We would all, not least those who survived the 1945 atomic bombings, like to see nuclear disarmament occur even sooner, but we have been advised by experts in this field that there are no physical or financial obstacles to dismantling all nuclear weapons and degrading all the special fissile materials that are required for making them by 2020. It is therefore strictly a matter of political will or, more accurately, of good faith.

The International Court of Justice found in 1996 that all nations are under a legal obligation to pursue and conclude good faith negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects. With this established obligation in mind, Mayors for Peace has called for negotiations on a framework agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons. If we are to remain on track for 2020, such negotiations should commence without delay and be concluded in 2010, the year of the next NPT Review Conference.

Messrs. Shultz, Kissinger, Perry and Nunn rightly observe that every president of both parties since Richard Nixon has reaffirmed these treaty obligations, but non-nuclear weapon states have grown increasingly skeptical of the sincerity of the nuclear powers. By challenging everyone to work toward a feasible date, bipartisan U.S. leadership could break through the pattern of vague promises.

In October 2006, the world voted 169 to 3 (U.S., India, North Korea) to abolish nuclear weapons. A dramatic change in U.S. nuclear policy would be warmly welcomed world-wide and lead to rapid liberation from the terrible threat we have lived with too long.

Tadatoshi Akiba
Mayor of Hiroshima
Japan President
of Mayors for Peace
Hiroshima, Japan