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Nuclear Zero Town Hall

Summary April 27, 2011

Sponsor: Brooklyn For Peace

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Brooklyn Friends Meeting - Social Action Committee

Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, NYC

Peace Action New York State

Reaching Critical Will

Womens International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Speaker: Randy Rydell, Ph.D., Senior Political Officer, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

The format involved three Question and Answer sessions – one with framing questions by the chair of BFP’s Nuclear Zero Committee, the second and third involving questions from the audience.

These topics were covered:

- links between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons;
- the international nuclear regime;
- opportunities for civil society action.

Rydell’s major theme was need for a comprehensive approach, comprehensively addressed by a single international agency. His touchstone is Dwight Eisenhower’s dictum: “If a problem cannot be solved, expand it.”

1. Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Weapons

Rydell detailed how “dual-use” technology makes nuclear energy an opening for the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He cited three approaches to address that problem (he favors the proposals of International Panel on Fissile Material):

- proposals for a treaty to “cut off” fissile materials, focussing on the production of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium for weapons (but not addressing existing stocks);
- Mohamed ElBaradei’s proposal for uranium enrichment only at central facilities controlled by the International Atomic Energy Agency; and
- the proposal of the International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFP), for an absolute prohibition on separation of plutonium, the phasing-out of highly enriched uranium as an energy source, and the phasing-in of low enriched uranium produced in facilities under mutli-lateral control.

On the future of nuclear energy, Rydell believes that the costs of tighter safety regulation, beyond the already unsustainable costs of nuclear energy, will eventually do the industry in. “Generation IV” technologies — designed to deal with the safety, waste disposal, cost and proliferation problems of

current technology – are still “only on paper,” won’t become operational until 2030/2040, and even then will require a shakedown period.

For Rydell, the critical issue is “opportunity costs”: widespread, rapid adoption of benign energy sources will be possible only if resources now invested in nuclear energy are reallocated.

2. The International Disarmament Machinery

Rydell noted the long history of United Nations involvement in nuclear issues, dating from Articles 11 and 47 of the United Nations Charter and General Assembly Resolution I(I) (pre-dating Hiroshima and Nagasaki), and the strong commitment of all United Nations Secretary-Generals, with the current Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, perhaps the most committed of all.

However, he identified problems in the system of international “disarmament machinery” -- overlaps and gaps (“black holes”) in coverage -- which he attributed to persisting differences in the policies of participating states and not some flaw in the machinery itself.

On inter-agency relations, he discussed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an independent agency within the UN family with a focus on nuclear energy and non-proliferation, and Rydell’s own agency, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, a United Nations unit focused on disarmament and proliferation.

On gaps, he discussed these topics, especially during the audience Question and Answer session: depleted uranium; weapons modernization, noting that all nuclear weapons states have “long-term” modernization programs; and delivery systems, especially missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (AEVs), including drones.

On de-nuclearization, he noted that the New Start treaty between the US and Russia only addresses weapons deployment, it doesn’t reduce the nuclear arsenals. Treaties, he said, have never resulted in the destruction of nuclear weapons.

3. Opportunities for Civil Society Action

Rydell noted these accomplishments of civil society: the Limited Nuclear Test Ban, the Ottawa Convention on Land Mines, and the ban on cluster munitions.

He focused on the potentially special roles of women, physicians, religious leaders and youth, and gave special credit to the leadership of women in progress so far.

Notes by **Bob Alpern**

Reviewed and approved by **Randy Rydell**

Brooklyn For Peace: Nuclear Zero Committee

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