

Open letter from Wildfire>_ to the members of the Non-aligned Movement

Geneva, 23 May 2014

Dear Members of the Non-aligned Movement

At your summit in Tehran in 2012 you agreed that “rich and powerful countries continue to exercise an inordinate influence in determining the nature and direction of international relations, ... as well as the rules governing these relations, many of which are at the expense of developing countries”. Nowhere is this more starkly apparent than in the area of nuclear disarmament. Nearly 70 years since the first use of nuclear weapons and over 40 years since the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, it is – perversely – those countries which possess nuclear weapons that control the nature and direction of multilateral efforts to get rid of them.

Given the inherent conflict of interest, it is not surprising that these “efforts” have gone nowhere. What *is* surprising is that the NAM continues to support them. Even as you declare that “the current international decision-making architecture in the fields of peace and security is outdated”, you cling to forums such as the Conference on Disarmament that not only are non-inclusive (88 of the 120 members of the NAM are not members of the CD), but also have proved utterly ineffective in meeting the priorities of developing countries over nearly two decades.

You say that nuclear disarmament remains the “highest priority” of the Movement. This is as it should be: the continued existence of nuclear weapons, and the obscene level of resources devoted by the nuclear-armed states to maintaining and renewing their arsenals, make a mockery of international cooperation to address pressing global problems of economic and social development. And yet you pursue this “highest priority” by sticking rigidly to the existing moribund and ineffective channels, by impotently invoking ancient texts and resolutions, and by waiting passively, as eternal supplicants, for the nuclear-armed states to move.

Is this really what the NAM is for? It seems contrary to the very essence of your existence as a movement. Perhaps it is a result of a perceived lack of alternatives. Perhaps it is due to the influence of certain members of the NAM that have strained the credibility of the Movement by acquiring nuclear weapons of their own. Perhaps it is something else. But whatever the case, it is time to change.

Everything you say about the injustice, danger and inherent inhumanity of nuclear weapons is right. All your complaints about the abject failure of the nuclear-armed states to engage

seriously on disarmament are fully justified. But it is not enough to be right; you have been right for decades. You also need to act.

You say you want to “build a fair, inclusive, transparent and effective system of joint global governance, based on justice and equitable participation of all countries”. So build one. Start negotiations on a treaty banning nuclear weapons. Do not wait for permission or agreement from the nuclear-armed states. Do not wait for movement in the forums controlled by the nuclear-armed states. Just go ahead and take multilateral action, in whatever setting works.

The recent international initiative to examine the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has demonstrated that nuclear weapons affect all states, and therefore are the responsibility of all states. It is not only your right to take action to ban these weapons, it is an urgent moral obligation. You may ask what the point is of negotiating a treaty banning nuclear weapons, without the involvement of the states that have them. The point is to take control of the narrative, to set the goals and terms of engagement, and to establish a global norm based on justice and equitable participation – in other words, to fulfill the fundamental aims and objectives of the Movement.

A ban treaty asks nothing of the nuclear-armed states that they have not already promised, but it asks on your terms, not theirs. A ban treaty imposes no additional burdens on those countries which have already forsaken nuclear weapons through the NPT. But a ban treaty will flush out those hypocritical developed countries which hide under nuclear alliances, and will force them to choose. It will also test the good faith of those NAM members which have curiously acquired their own nuclear arsenals while claiming to support disarmament.

Reflect for a moment on what the nuclear-armed states would find easier to deal with and control: a General Assembly resolution lamenting their lack of action? A high-level meeting to review “progress” in 2018? A vaguely-worded and non-committal outcome document from the NPT review conference? Or a multilateral treaty, with 140 or more members, explicitly and forever outlawing nuclear weapons, and making outlaws of those who possess them?

A treaty banning nuclear weapons is not a magic solution. Nobody can force the nuclear-armed states to disarm. But pursuing a ban treaty will profoundly reshape the politics of global security, and empower developing countries to take their rightful place in setting the terms of a world free of nuclear weapons. (You can read more about how a ban treaty would work at www.wildfire-v.org.)

You have said that “key decisions concerning the issues of global governance can no longer be the preserve of a small group of countries.” Make it so. Start now. Whether you act as a cohesive movement, or as individual members, it is time for the NAM to wake, and to lead.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lennane', with a stylized, cursive script.

Richard Lennane
Chief Inflammatory Officer
Wildfire>_