

1 **NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: THE TIME IS NOW**

2 A Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly of the
3 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service
4 November 12, 2009

5
6 *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*
7 - John 10:10

8
9 *“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*
10 - 2 Corinthians 6:2

11
12 **INTRODUCTION**

13
14 Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, declared that He had come to bring “abundant life” to
15 humanity. Nuclear weapons, which have the capacity to destroy entire cities and nations, and,
16 indeed, all life on earth, represent the diametric opposite to this. In fact, the only thing that they
17 are capable of producing is “abundant death.” The time has arrived to eliminate all of them,
18 before they eliminate all of us. Be it therefore resolved that the National Council of the
19 Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. hereby recommits itself to the total worldwide eradication of
20 nuclear weapons.

21
22 For over sixty years, the United States has relied on the possession of an arsenal of nuclear
23 weapons in order to impose world peace and deter attack. It has accomplished neither. Rather, it
24 has siphoned off untold billions of dollars that could have been spent on far more just and
25 productive means of ensuring global “security” through economic and cultural development and
26 cooperation. It has poisoned our air, our water, and our children. It has produced toxic waste
27 products that will remain radioactive for millions of years. Many believe it has also engendered a
28 false sense of security coupled with inordinate pride, much resented by other nations. This has
29 only served to degrade the status and esteem accorded to the U.S. by other peoples of the world,
30 not to maintain or improve them. The same might be said of other nations that possess nuclear
31 weapons.

32
33 Many expected that the nuclear menace would gradually disappear twenty years ago with the end
34 of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. While commendable progress was made
35 towards reducing nuclear arsenals and defusing the tension between the two sides, these
36 measures did not go far enough. Efforts have faltered, due in part to the perception that the
37 “nuclear club” states believe that they are entitled to ignore commitments made under the
38 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to eliminate their own weapons. But there is “a core
39 hypocrisy” here: “The possession of these weapons and the readiness of a handful of countries
40 to use them upgrades their perceived value and thus stimulates their proliferation and undermines
41 efforts to control their spread.”¹ This has provided a convenient opening for a growing number of
42 nations to seek after these deadly weapons and thus threatens to ignite a second arms race. Even
43 more frightening is the prospect that inadequately-secured fissile material will get into the hands
44 of suicidal terrorists.

45
46 It is understandable that conventional wisdom would dictate that this is not the time for the
47 United States to eliminate its nuclear shield. Rather, we should maintain a strong nuclear arsenal

48 as a deterrent to attack. This reasoning breaks down for a number of reasons. As Jonathan
49 Granoff puts it, “Nuclear weapons are of no value against terrorists, they’re suicidal to use
50 against a country that has them, and it’s patently immoral to use them against a country that
51 doesn’t have them. So why do we have them?”² But what about “rogue states,” such as North
52 Korea and Iran, which have recently acquired or may soon develop their own atomic bombs?
53 Here, we must rely on the diplomatic weight of the entire rest of the world coming down on
54 them, peaceably, in order to induce change. This will not happen, however, until the United
55 States takes the lead.

56
57

58 HISTORY

59

60 The National Council of Churches has a long history of advocating for the restriction, control,
61 and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons (see the selected bibliography attached). This
62 commitment is based on solid theological grounding, which goes back to the earliest years of the
63 organization. Thus, in 1951, a year after the current formation of the Council was founded, the
64 following was included in the seminal policy statement, “The National Council of Churches
65 Views its Task in Christian Life and Work”:

66

67 History is purposeful and orderly because the world is in the hands of God, who
68 made it. Cause leads to effect; and moral and spiritual factors are just as real as
69 material factors – even more real. Man, in the exercise of his free will, can no more
70 disregard the moral laws of the universe with impunity than he can disregard the
71 physical laws of the universe with impunity. He does not break them; he breaks
72 himself upon them when he disregards them.

73

74 Man, being a creature of God, has a destiny above and beyond this world. Hence his
75 essential security and his essential freedom are not derived from this world. They
76 are not for this world to give or destroy. It is equally disastrous either for the powers
77 of this world to try to destroy them, or for the people to try to find them in this world.
78 They are ends which this world should serve. But essential security rests only in the
79 righteousness of God, and essential freedom only in His service. The state or society
80 that presumes to bestow or withhold either assumes the prerogatives of God. The
81 man who expects either from the world denies God and surrenders himself to certain
82 frustration and defeat.³

83

84 While the non-inclusive language may sound jarring to our ears, there are important theological
85 principles that emerge from these paragraphs which still guide this Council’s life and work. Two
86 especially stand out: first, that the blatant violation of God’s moral law is ultimately self-
87 destructive: “He does not break them; he breaks himself upon them when he disregards them.”
88 These words perfectly describe the suicidal result of any future deployment of nuclear weapons,
89 because in destroying the enemy, the perpetrators would also ensure their own, and everybody
90 else’s, annihilation.

91

92 Second, true security and authentic freedom derive only from our sovereign Creator.
93 Consequently, when a state or society presumes to be able to bestow or ensure either, especially
94 when based on the raw exercise of power, this is to assume “the prerogatives of God.” In other

95 words, it is idolatry, and it will inevitably fail. A country may amass the greatest and most
96 sophisticated military machine in history; it may extend its power and influence and economic
97 might to every corner of the globe; but none of this – least of all, our nuclear arsenal – guarantees
98 our “national security”. All it took was a small group of committed fanatics with nothing more
99 deadly than box cutters and with commercial jets as their missiles to demonstrate this truth.
100 Later in the same document, sound scriptural direction is provided, regarding the proper
101 application of the concept of “security:”

102
103 Christ taught us to seek the well-being of our neighbors but He showed little
104 concern for His own personal security. To seek security for others is a
105 requirement of justice. It is ennobling. To seek security for ourselves at the
106 expense of others is debasing and self-defeating for the nation and for the
107 individual. The United States will not inspire the world by making its own
108 security its chief end. It may even lose it by seeking it. “Whosoever will save his
109 life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”⁴

110
111 Considering how many *trillions* of dollars we have spent on nuclear weapons over the last seven
112 decades, and how little we have to show for it, these words are sadly prophetic.

113
114 Condemnation of the use of atomic weapons was first expressed in an American ecumenical
115 context in 1945 by the predecessor organization to the NCC, the Federal Council of Churches,
116 shortly after the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵ It is clear that these church leaders were
117 horrified by the indiscriminate death caused by such a weapon of mass destruction. Such
118 misgivings soon gave way to a cautious acceptance of their “defensive” use, however, as the
119 Cold War got underway. Nevertheless, we already see a call for an end to the arms race by the
120 Governing Board of the National Council of Churches in 1951. At that time, they stated the
121 following: “History offers convincing evidence that the kind of peace for which Christians pray
122 cannot be achieved by piling gun upon gun and bomb upon bomb. We warn the people of our
123 churches that the civilization which they treasure may be destroyed unless the nations agree on a
124 plan for the control of armaments on a global scale.”⁶

125
126 Control and reduction of armaments was called for in 1957 and again in 1958, in response to the
127 beginning of the “Space Age,” which presented such dangerous implications for the use of space
128 for purposes of nuclear war.⁷

129
130 In 1960, we see the first mention of the need for “enforceable agreements to eliminate weapons
131 of death,” clearly referring to those “ultimate weapons, which threaten victim and aggressor alike
132 with mutual suicide.”⁸ This was coupled with a strong message of support for the United
133 Nations, as the most appropriate body in existence for overseeing the enforcement of any future
134 arms agreements, and for creating a stable international order.⁹

135
136 While the decade of the 1960’s was primarily preoccupied with pronouncements expressing
137 concern about or opposition to the War in Vietnam, the issue of the nuclear threat was not
138 ignored. In “Imperatives of Peace and Responsibilities of Power,” the Governing Board
139 recognized that, “in order to avert nuclear holocaust it is imperative that limits be imposed upon
140 the use of military might, and that the inherent limitation of force in the solution of human and
141 social problems be recognized.”¹⁰ Here, we hear echoes of the warnings about political hubris

142 from 1951. The world is in God’s hands; we cannot compel the rest of humankind to do our will
143 based solely on the sheer magnitude of our military power. The document, furthermore, called
144 for a reassessment of our country’s foreign policy assumptions and goals based on a more
145 realistic acceptance of our true place in the world as one nation among many, rather than either
146 the world’s savior or the world’s policeman. It again called for an increased reliance on the
147 United Nations and other international bodies in order to foster peace with justice.
148

149 In that same year, the Governing Board published “Defense and Disarmament: New
150 Requirements for Security.” This remarkable document, far-reaching in its vision and clear-
151 headed in its understanding of the larger issues regarding peace with justice, combined sound
152 theological principles with practical, detailed prescriptions for the changes which, if they had
153 been heeded, would surely have resulted in a quickening of the pace of nuclear disarmament and
154 the consequent reduction in tensions between the great powers. It emphasized instead the need
155 for international development and dialogue as the most appropriate and effective means for
156 achieving lasting security for our nation and, indeed, the entire world.¹¹
157

158 During the following two decades the NCC weighed in on all the major controversies of the day
159 regarding the nuclear threat (see the bibliography for the documentation):
160

- 161 • Opposed to the anti-ballistic missile program (1969)
- 162 • Supported the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (1971)
- 163 • Supported United Nations conferences on nuclear disarmament (1975 and later)
- 164 • Opposed nuclear fuel reprocessing because of the threat of proliferation (1976)
165
- 166 • Called for the complete cessation of all explosive nuclear testing (1977)
- 167 • Declared total opposition to the possession or use of nuclear weapons and called for their
168 complete elimination (1977)
169
- 170 • Called for a nuclear weapons freeze (1981)
- 171 • Declared that the 1980’s escalation of the arms race was “utterly in conflict with
172 the Gospel of Christ” (1981)
173
- 174 • Celebrated the excellent work of the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in
175 their 1983 Pastoral Letter on the nuclear crisis, “The Challenge of Peace: God’s
176 Promise and our Response,” while also using this as an opportunity to recognize
177 the serious “unresolved questions” that confront all Christians with regard to this
178 difficult issue
179
- 180 • Expressed excitement and hope at the time of the Reagan-Gorbachev Meeting in
181 Reykjavik, Iceland, that almost achieved a breakthrough with regard to the
182 elimination of both country’s nuclear arsenals (1986)
183

- 184 • Congratulated the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. on achieving an agreement in principle
185 (later carried out) to eliminate intermediate nuclear forces from Europe (1987)
186

187 In 1999, the NCC General Assembly adopted “Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century, A
188 Policy Statement on the United Nations.” It enunciated the following Bible-based
189 principles:

- 190
191 1) the transcending sovereignty and love of God for all creation and the
192 expression of that love in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose mission was to
193 reveal understanding about that divine presence, to proclaim a message of
194 salvation and to bring justice and peace; 2) the unity of creation and the equality
195 of all races and peoples; 3) the dignity and worth of each person as a child of
196 God; and 4) the church, the body of believers, whose global mission of witness,
197 peacemaking and reconciliation testifies to God’s action in history.¹²
198

199 These formed the theological foundation upon which seven “pillars of peace” were affirmed.
200 Among them was “Peace and Conflict Resolution,” that called for the “end of the unrestrained
201 production, sale and use of weapons worldwide.”¹³ This document formed the basis for then-
202 General Secretary Bob Edgar’s presentation “Ecumenical Witness for Peace, Justice and
203 Sustainability” at the Millennium Peace Summit at the United Nations in 2000, and it still
204 informs our work today.
205

206 207 CONCLUSION

208
209 There are a number of compelling reasons why it is appropriate for the National Council of
210 Churches to revisit the issue of total nuclear disarmament at this time:
211

- 212 • While the Council has a long history of involvement with this issue, it has not spoken
213 directly about it since 1988. Much has happened since then to change the world. There
214 is a strong consensus among experts in the field, that, given developments already
215 underway towards acquiring or perfecting nuclear weapons in North Korea, Iran, and
216 elsewhere, now may be the last time that the world can realistically come together to ban
217 the bomb through diplomatic measures. However, influence can only be brought to bear
218 on the “rogue” states if those who already have the bomb agree to fulfill the binding
219 agreement made under the Nonproliferation Treaty—to to accept a gradual but constant
220 draw-down of their nuclear stockpiles until none are left. As Brazil’s former Ambassador
221 Sergio Duarte said in 2005: “(O)ne cannot worship at the altar of nuclear weapons and
222 raise heresy charges against those who want to join the sect.”¹⁴
223
- 224 • There is a growing movement both worldwide and here in the U.S. to move towards
225 elimination of nuclear weapons. It has gathered a lot of momentum because of the
226 prominence of some of the key figures, such as George Shultz, William Perry, Henry
227 Kissinger and Sam Nunn. It has strong support in the religious community as well as
228 among various non-governmental organizations. World leaders, such as Presidents
229 Barack Obama and Demetri Medvedev (Russia) have taken notice and have spoken
230 favorably of this prospect. Public pressure is key to the success of this effort, however,

231 since it is reported that there is significant resistance to this campaign being exerted,
232 especially from the military.

- 233
- 234 • 2011 will mark the end of the World Council of Churches *Decade to Overcome Violence*.
235 A strong NCC witness, based on action for education and advocacy here at home, would
236 be a most welcome contribution.

237

238 Is it possible to put the genie back in the bottle? Yes, because, once the current worldwide
239 stockpile of weapons is eliminated, it will become extremely difficult to assemble the raw
240 materials to make a new one without the rest of the world taking notice and forcing an end to
241 such efforts. This would require continued support for the U.N.'s international inspection system.
242 This would also keep nuclear devices out of the hands of terrorist organizations—the
243 technology and construction of a nuclear device is so extremely complicated and energy-
244 intensive that it is not feasible to imagine that a terrorist group could actually make and employ
245 one on their own successfully.¹⁵

246

247 The prospect for what might happen if we do not act is too terrible to contemplate: nuclear
248 winter, the end of all human life on earth, and the transformation of much or all of our planet into
249 a radioactive hell. This far outstrips the potential damage that could be done by any other
250 environmental threat. The end of the Cold War did not make the world safer; quite the opposite.
251 It is time to finish what Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev began in Reykjavik. It is time to
252 realize that we cannot ensure our own security by force of arms, even if they be the most
253 powerful weapons ever created. Our lives are in God's hands. For once, let us put our trust in
254 those hands as well. "*Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"

255

256

257

258 RESOLUTION

259

260 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the member communions of the National Council
261 of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) and Church World Service (CWS), speaking
262 together through their respective governing boards, hereby reaffirm the goal of the total
263 disarmament of nuclear weapons and commit themselves:

- 264 1. to ask for commitments toward this end from national, state, and local governmental
265 and ecumenical representatives and agencies.
- 266 2. to engage in international anti-violence advocacy efforts including the programs and
267 events of the World Council of Churches such as the *Decade for Overcoming Violence*.
- 268 3. to encourage appropriate working groups/committees to designate nuclear
269 disarmament as a central theme for the 2011 Ecumenical Advocacy Days.
- 270 4. to develop measurable outcomes that inform faith-based educational materials.

271

272 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the President and the General Secretary of the NCCC
273 and the Chairperson and Executive Director/CEO of the CWS communicate this
274 commitment to the President of the United States and congressional leaders.

275

276 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the President and the General Secretary of the**
277 **NCCC and the Chairperson and Executive Director/CEO of the CWS report regularly to**
278 **the General Assembly regarding their actions toward the end of nuclear disarmament.**
279

280
281

282 NOTES

283

284 1. Jonathan Granoff. "The Call to a New Moral Imperative." in *Reflections*, vol. 96, no. 1
285 (Spring, 2009) – "The Fire Next Time: Faith and the Future of Nuclear Weapons" p. 15.

286 2. Ibid., p. 18.

287 3. NCC Policy Statement, "The National Council of Churches Views Its Task in Christian
288 Life and Work." May 16, 1951, p. 9.1-2.

289 4. Ibid., p. 9.1-3.

290 5. David Cortright. "Transcending Ambivalence: A History of Religious Engagement with
291 the Bomb." in *Reflections*, vol. 96, no. 1 (Spring, 2009), p. 35.

292 6. NCC Policy Statement, "International Regulation and Reduction of Armaments."
293 November 28, 1951, p. 5.1-1.

294 7. NCC Policy Statements, "Some Hopes and Concerns of the Church in the Nuclear-Space
295 Age." December 5, 1957 and "The Churches Concern in Policies Related to the Control
296 of Armaments and of the Use of Space." June 4, 1958.

297 8. NCC Policy Statement, "Toward a Family of Nations Under God: Agenda of Action for
298 Peace." June 2, 1960, 25.2-1- 25.2-2.

299 9. Ibid.

300 10. NCC Policy Statement, "Imperatives of Peace and Responsibilities of Power." February
301 21, 1968, p. 25.6-3.

302 11. NCC Policy Statement, "Defense and Disarmament: New Requirements for Security."
303 September 12, 1968.

304 12. NCC Policy Statement, "Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century: A Policy Statement on the
305 United Nations." November 11, 1999, p. 1.

306 13. Ibid., p. 2.

307 14. Quoted in J. Granoff, "The Call to a New Moral Imperative." *Reflections*, vol. 96, no. 1
308 (Spring, 2009), p. 15.

309 15. See "This is Humanity's Climactic Moment – An Interview with Jayantha Dhanapala." in
310 *Reflections*, vol. 96, no. 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 46-47.

311

312 BIBLIOGRAPHY

313 NCC Statements Related to Nuclear Disarmament

- 314
315 Statement on the International Situation. (NCC General Board Policy Statement; Jan. 17, 1951)
316
317 The National Council of Churches Views Its Task in Christian Life and Work. (NCC General
318 Board Policy Statement; May 16, 1951)
319
320 International Regulation and Reduction of Armaments. (NCC General Board Policy Statement;
321 Nov. 28, 1951)
322
323 Some Hopes and Concerns of the Church in the Nuclear-Space Age. (NCC General Board Policy
324 Statement; Dec. 5, 1957)
325
326 The Churches' Concern in Policies Related to the Control of Armaments and of the Use of Space.
327 (NCC General Board Policy Statement; June 4, 1958)
328
329 The Churches and the Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes. (NCC Governing Board
330 Policy Statement; June 2, 1960)
331
332 Toward a Family of Nations Under God: Agenda of Action for Peace. (NCC General Board
333 Policy Statement; June 2, 1960)
334
335 Resolution for a Special Emphasis on Peace. (NCC General Board Resolution; June 5, 1964)
336
337 Imperatives of Peace and Responsibilities of Power. (NCC General Board Policy Statement; Feb.
338 21, 1968)
339
340 Defense and Disarmament: New Requirements for Security. (NCC General Board Policy
341 Statement; Sept. 12, 1968)
342
343 Background Paper for Study on "Defense and Disarmament: New Requirements for Security."
344 (NCC Department of International Affairs Study Document; 1968)
345
346 Resolution on the Anti-Ballistic Missile. (NCC General Board Resolution; May 2, 1969)
347
348 Resolution on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. (NCC Department of International Affairs
349 Committee Resolution; June 4, 1971)
350
351 Resolution on Military Force and Foreign Policy. (NCC General Assembly Resolution; Dec. 6,
352 1972)
353
354 Resolution on Senate Resolution 67 on Suspension of Nuclear Testing. (NCC Governing Board
355 Resolution; Oct. 14, 1973)
356

357 Resolution on a United Nations Conference on Nuclear Disarmament. (NCC Governing Board
358 Resolution; Oct. 12, 1975)
359
360 Resolution on Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Resulting From Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing
361 Technology. (NCC Governing Board Resolution; Oct. 8, 1976)
362
363 The Complete Cessation of All Explosive Nuclear Testing. (NCC Governing Board Resolution;
364 May 4, 1977) <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/cessationofnucleartesting0577.pdf>
365
366 The United Nations and World Community. (NCC Governing Board Policy Statement; May 4,
367 1977)
368
369 Resolution on Nuclear Weapons. (NCC Governing Board Resolution; Nov. 10, 1977)
370 <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/resolutiononnuclearweapons1177.pdf>
371
372 Swords Into Plowshares: The Churches' Witness for Disarmament. (NCC Governing Board
373 Resolution; May 10, 1978)
374
375 Resolution to Curtail Supply of Anti-Personnel Weapons by U.S. to Israel and Other Nations and
376 Restrict Use of Existing Supplies. (NCC Governing Board Resolution; Board
377 May 12, 1978.)
378
379 Resolution Concerning Follow-Up Action to the Consultation of the Churches on Disarmament.
380 (NCC Governing Board Resolution; May 9, 1980)
381
382 Resolution on Congressional Committees on "Security and Terrorism." (NCC Resolution; May
383 13, 1981)
384
385 Resolution on a Nuclear Weapons Freeze. (NCC Resolution; May 14, 1981)
386
387 Action on Escalation of the Arms Race. (NCC Governing Board Action Statement; Nov. 5,
388 1981)
389
390 Swords Into Plowshares: The Churches' Witness for Disarmament II. (NCC Governing Board
391 Resolution; May 13, 1982)
392
393 Peacemaking and Ecumenism: A Celebration of the Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter. (NCC
394 Governing Board Resolution; May 13, 1983)
395
396 The Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Disaster. (NCC Governing Board Resolution; May 23,
397 1986)
398
399 A Message Concerning Arms Negotiations following the Reagan-Gorbachev Meeting at
400 Reykjavik. (NCC Governing Board Document; Nov. 6, 1986)
401
402 Resolution on the Agreement in Principle between the USA and the USSR on the Elimination of
403 Intermediate Nuclear Forces. (NCC Executive Committee Resolution; Sept. 18, 1987)

404
405 Disarmament. (NCC Governing Board Resolution; May 26, 1988)
406
407 Commending President Bush for a Dialogical Approach to the Current Crisis in the USSR. (NCC
408 General Board Resolution; May 18, 1990)
409
410 Resolution to Endorse the Call for a Complete Ban on Anti-Personnel Landmines. (NCC General
411 Board Resolution; Nov. 17, 1995)
412
413 Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century: A Policy Statement on the United Nations. (NCC/CWS
414 General Assembly Policy Statement; Nov. 11, 1999)
415 <http://www.ncccusa.org/about/pillars.html>
416
417 After September 11, 2001: Public Policy Considerations for the United States of America.
418 (NCC/CWS General Assembly Resolution, Dec. 16, 2002)
419 <http://www.ncccusa.org/news/02news97b.html>