

Welcome Remarks

by

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Director General, ICWA

at Inaugural Session of

**National Outreach Conference on
“Global Nuclear Disarmament”**

at

Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

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Shri Shivshankar Menon, National Security Adviser, Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, an eminent thinker, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, M.P. and the driving force behind this conference, Members of Parliament, Excellencies, distinguished invitees, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs and our partners, I extend a very warm welcome to the National Security Adviser who has graciously spared time to be here in order to help us inaugurate this conference. We are also grateful to Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi who will deliver the keynote address. I joyously welcome all our distinguished speakers, debaters, students and others who have come out in large numbers to participate in this daylong National Outreach Conference on Global Nuclear Disarmament. We are particularly thankful to the vice chancellors and principals of nearly 40 educational institutions that have sent their students here.

We gather here today to reflect on the desirability and feasibility of a nuclear weapons-free world. Many, nay most, of us would agree that it is a noble goal. Contrarians, however, may argue that even if the goal is noble, it is neither easy nor feasible to achieve it. The question that poses itself: should we then not try, and try hard?

To all of us, a common source of inspiration should be the hibakushas, the survivors of the atom bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. A few of them visited India recently. They were 'old, sick or tired', as a host put it, but they were all driven by a strong conviction that humankind should not and cannot co-exist with nuclear weapons.

Twenty-four years ago, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi conceived the Action Plan for Nuclear Weapons Free and Non-Violent World Order. He presented it before the Third Special Session on Disarmament of the UN General Assembly on 9 June 1988. Cautioning that nuclear war ‘will mean the end of life as we know it on our planet Earth’, he observed:

The ultimate power to bring about changes rests with the people. It is not the power of weapons or economic strength which will determine the shape of the world beyond nuclear weapons. That will be determined in the minds and the hearts of thinking men and women around the world.

Subsequently India’s Working Paper on Nuclear Disarmament of 2006 offered a viable political and strategic framework for carrying forward Rajiv Gandhi’s plan. This was submitted again to the Conference on Disarmament in 2007. In a message to the Global Zero Summit last year, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh observed: ‘India has been steadfast in its support for global, non-discriminatory, verifiable nuclear disarmament.’ He stressed that the goal of nuclear disarmament can be achieved through ‘a step-by-step process underwritten by a universal commitment and an agreed multilateral framework that is global and non-discriminatory.’

Shri Rajiv Gandhi’s vision, astutely crafted and well articulated, remains valid today. The Prime Minister’s Informal Group on RGAP 1988 believes that there is ‘no contradiction’ between India having nuclear weapons and its support for global nuclear disarmament. In fact, the Informal Group asserts that India being ‘a State with nuclear weapons’

and supporting time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons globally has more credibility today than before.

According to our Parliament, the Indian Council of World Affairs is 'an institution of national importance'. As a premier think tank with impressive pedigree, it is engaged in comprehensive study and research on foreign policy and in offering alternative policy models for consideration of the Government and people of this country. We feel privileged to host this conference, in collaboration with Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar and our other partners such as the Public Diplomacy division of MEA, University Grants Commission and the Government of National Capital Region of Delhi.

Our purpose is simple: we want the youth of India, the heirs of tomorrow, to comprehend the dangers of nuclear weapons, and to appreciate that there is a way, the one shown by the Action Plan, to eliminate those terrible weapons. As we celebrate the 68th birth anniversary of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, this is an apt moment for introspection, debate, advocacy and action.

Once again, I thank you all most warmly for your presence and participation in this extraordinary dialogue on a most vital and pertinent theme of our times.

Thank you very much for your attention.
