

Forum II: Towards a world without war and nuclear weapons - International solidarity among parliamentarians and citizens

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It is a huge honour to address you here today. I'm deeply moved by the stories of the Hibakusha, who I had the honour of meeting already at the third TPNW meeting in New York. Their experience, suffering is unimaginable. Their determination to share their experiences is more important than ever, as current events show the urgent need for peace and nuclear disarmament. We must ensure such tragedy never happens again—especially now that nuclear weapons are even more powerful.

After World War II, shocked by its horrors, especially in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, under pressure from the people that wanted peace, the world learned lessons. We created the UN and its 1948 Charter to support international law and peaceful conflict resolution. Nationally, countries like Italy renounced war in their constitutions. But Japan's Article 9 stands out, forever rejecting war as a right and forbidding violence to settle disputes. This should be an inspiration to all nations.

Yet World War II's end also started a global arms race. The U.S wanted to guarantee global dominance. Which is why after the A-bomb came the H-bomb. The Soviet Union got the message and caught up. Others would follow. The prevalent nuclear arms doctrine claimed that Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) would keep us safe. MAD is not only irrational and immoral—it is dangerous. Under MAD, both sides had enough nuclear weapons to guarantee total destruction if war broke out, relying on the threat of second-strike retaliation to deter attack. This criminal doctrine depends on threatening mass civilian deaths for deterrence and led to an endless build-up and modernization of nuclear and missile arsenals. In turn, more countries sought nuclear weapons. The U.S. in particular aimed for first-strike capability, the ability to destroy an enemy's capacity to retaliate. Ronald Reagan's missile shield was one such project. Other countries scrambled to secure a second-strike.

Uncertainty grew. The result: a dangerous arms race and nuclear proliferation, with ever more destructive weapons.

In the midst of this MADness, Ireland - a European country that never joined the US-led military alliance NATO - took the initiative for a Non-Proliferation Treaty. And the UN General Assembly proved up to the challenge. The Soviet Union pushed for the Helsinki process in the 1970s. The West and the East coming together was a turning point. Pierre Harmel, Belgium's Foreign Minister, helped inspire this with his focus on dialogue and cooperation.

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Instead of just focusing on military or political issues, the Helsinki process included economics, the environment, and human rights. The idea of “collective and indivisible security” was central: no one is safe unless everyone is. Real peace means everyone knowing they are secure from war and threat. The Helsinki process helped reduce Cold War tensions and led to important disarmament agreements and would eventually lead to the creation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. These built trust in Europe. Helsinki also paved the way for START nuclear control treaties between the US and the Soviet Union, and showed that alternatives are possible.

Today, these hard-won lessons and structures are being rapidly dismantled. Never has more money been spent on weapons. Year after year records are broken. US president Trump used NATO to arbitrarily impose his 5% norm. European countries should spend 5% of their GDP on arms. Why? Not because we spend too little on arms. NATO countries already vastly outspend Russia and China on defense. No. This is not about defence. It is about warmongering.

Imperialist countries, including EU states, show no real respect for international law or human rights. For years before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a US-led coalition systematically dismantled both arms control treaties and international law as a whole. In 1999, they illegally bombed Yugoslavia; in 2003, Iraq—on false pretenses of weapons of mass destruction; in 2011, Libya, leaving chaos behind. More recently, they bombed Iran, violating the UN Charter and Geneva Convention. This doesn’t even count the 20-year occupation of Afghanistan, or of the fact that every US president since 2002 has bombed Yemen.

Now Trump wants to focus on China, considered an economic rival to U.S. hegemony. Indeed, in a world that is tilting, with the rise of new, important powers, the U.S. want to use their military power to maintain an ever more elusive global dominance.

The US withdrew from arms control treaties such as the Anti-ballistic missile Treaty, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Open Skies treaty. Nuclear forces, including US weapons in Belgium, are being rapidly modernized. Russia left the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Unlike China or India, neither NATO nor Russia refuse to rule out nuclear first strikes.

Unfortunately, Europe is mostly following the U.S. submissively, even when this hurts its own population. Spending 5% of GDP on arms will mean massive social destruction in many countries: pensions, social security, hospitals, schools all underfunded to pay for the arms race. The EU does not even seem interested in peace on the continent anymore. There is little real interest in collective security from European leaders. They see only military options in regard to Russia. Notwithstanding the recent failure of the Israeli Iron Dome showed no missile defence will ever guarantee security, European politicians want to invest hundreds of

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billions in new missile shields, dreaming of a first-strike capacity. The OSCE on the other hand—a core security and diplomatic body we inherited from the Cold War—is underfunded; its annual budget is below the price of a modern F-22 fighter jet. Diplomatic services are being cut.

Despite all this, Cold War history proves that people can make a difference and that alternatives exist. The Western peace movement pushed their own governments to choose diplomacy. The UK's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, US groups like the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Freeze campaign, and protests against the Vietnam War all demanded an end to nuclear escalation. In the early 1980s, opposition to the stationing of Euromissiles sparked the biggest peace protests in postwar Europe—hundreds of thousands marched in Brussels, Berlin, Bonn, London, Amsterdam, and Rome, with 500,000 rallying in Bonn alone in 1983. Or think, most recently to mass demonstrations against the Iraq war in 2003 or in support of Palestine, opposing Western complicity in genocide.

Hope comes from people and their collective action. I've heard how the Japanese people mobilize for the beautiful island of Okinawa and for the protection of their Constitution. We need this spirit everywhere. War is made from above; peace comes from below. Together, we must oppose imperialism. That means refusing this NATO drive to war, refusing the massive transfer of money to the military-industrial complex, basing our foreign policy on diplomacy, not an arms race. And yes of course this means joining the TPNW, a wonderful initiative from many Southern countries, and removing US nuclear weapons from Belgium - and everywhere -, reopening talks for collective security, and a new START treaty for arms reduction by 2026. Hiroshima must always remind us of the need for disarmament and diplomacy. Let's work for that world.