

Open Letter to President Obama on Nuclear Weapons

September 18, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The end of the Cold War changed the world. September 11, 2001, changed it again. As you said in your April speech in Prague, "In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up."

U.S. nuclear weapons policy must change as well. We cannot rely on old approaches and old thinking to meet these new threats. As president, your most profound responsibility is to keep us safe and prevent the use or spread of these frighteningly powerful weapons.

Today, representing diverse walks of life, we speak with one voice to urge you to chart a new, common-sense, step-by-step approach that will reduce the threats that nuclear weapons pose.

We urge you to become directly involved in the nuclear policy review your administration is now conducting. This review will have a far-reaching impact on the security of all Americans and presents you with a critical opportunity to develop a U.S. nuclear weapons policy that is appropriate for today's world.

Simply put, nuclear weapons are a liability in an increasingly dangerous world. There are more than 20,000 nuclear weapons worldwide. Terrorist groups could acquire a nuclear weapon and explode it in a city.

The United States and Russia possess 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons and each country keeps over a thousand on hair-trigger status ready for immediate launch. It is unacceptable that tens of millions of lives could be extinguished within an hour by an accidental or unauthorized launch of missiles. As you said in Prague, "One nuclear weapon exploded in one city . . . could kill hundreds of thousands of people. And no matter where it happens, there is no end to what the consequences might be – for our global safety, our security, our society, our economy, to our ultimate survival."

The only purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter other nations from using nuclear weapons against us or our allies. We can accomplish that with far fewer nuclear weapons than the thousands still in our arsenal. There is no realistic situation in which our preemptive use of nuclear weapons would be justified or make us more secure in the long run.

This pragmatic approach has strong bipartisan support, including the support of many respected foreign policy experts. With U.S. leadership, the world can take the necessary steps to move toward true security and escape the growing threat posed by nuclear weapons. By playing this positive role, the United States can also enhance its international standing. We urge you to seize this historic opportunity.

Brigadier General John Adams, US Army (Retired)

Former Deputy U.S. Military Representative to NATO

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard

Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor

Northland – A Church Distributed

Leon M. Lederman, Nobel Laureate in Physics

Professor, Illinois Institute of Technology

Director Emeritus, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory

Barry S. Levy, M.D., M.P.H.

Former President, American Public Health Association,

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