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Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament (MIND)

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Friends, let me start by saying that I am not only happy and grateful to be here but I am extremely proud to be present at this very impressive and inspiring gathering of more than 400 people. In fact, in some respects you in the peace movement in Pakistan have taken the lead, seized the initiative, even more than we have in India. So I will go back inspired by this conference. We hope that in India too, we will be able to organise an equally big initiative.

I speak to you both as an Indian and as an activist who has been writing on, acting on, talking about, participating in, various protests on the nuclear question for more than fifteen years. I also speak to you as a member, and one of the founders of, MIND - Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament, which is a loose coalition of several different kinds of people: teachers, scholars, feminists, human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and artists. We have people from different economic backgrounds, from different cities, from different ethnic groups, from different regions.

MIND believes that it is imperative for us in South Asia to build a citizens' movement and only such a movement can actually lead us to an alternative trajectory, away from the path of insanity along which our leaders are now taking us - the path of nuclearization, the path to greater insecurity, the path to greater discord, the path to nuclear confrontation, to threat-mongering, to enormous war preparations, to creating systems of mass destruction in the two countries.

We believe that it is not enough for state-level actors alone, however well-meaning they might be, to put on the brakes and stop this journey to disaster. It is citizens' initiatives that will play a crucial role here. There is simply no alternative to citizens taking the issue in their own hands, empowering themselves and building a strong campaign. A campaign which

demands that nuclear weapons should never be manufactured in this region, that they should not be inducted and they should not be deployed.

MIND, and campaigns like what you have here in the Pakistan Peace Coalition, have to be very clear about a few things. And I just want to explain why I think it is absolutely crucial that we have an unambiguous, categorical and unconditional opposition to nuclear weapons, in fact even to nuclear weapons preparations.

We know, and we should be clear at the end of 10 months after the nuclear tests of May, that nuclearization has not given greater security either to India or to Pakistan. In fact, it has degraded our security. Today, millions of people living in different cities in India and Pakistan have become vulnerable to attacks by nuclear weapons that can kill and maim literally millions of people, weapons against which there is no defense, against which there can be no military, civil or medical defense. Ballistic missiles are almost impossible to intercept. Both countries have such missiles. It is completely impossible to reliably prevent accidental, unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons. Because they cause destruction on a mass scale, on a scale hitherto unimaginable, we must never make or deploy these weapons.

Now, there are a few lessons since May that should be very clear to all of us. Both India's and Pakistan's stature in the world has diminished as a result of nuclearization. We are considered in some sense semi-pariah states throughout the world. This view is prevalent not only in the Security Council and among the powerful states, the Great Powers. It is true of the Non-Aligned Movement, this is true of the Third World, this is true of the ASEAN region, of Africa, of our own neighbors.

We, our governments, are deeply unpopular, we are suspect, our intentions are considered dishonorable. All our rulers, both in India and Pakistan are seen to be people who have cheated the international community, cheated on their own commitment to exercising

nuclear restraint, and cheated their own people. Just today, you must have read that India has increased its defense budget by 11%. The headlines in Pakistani press today are about the budget, which was presented just yesterday. The finance minister has raised the allocation to military spending by 11%. Friends, it is not education, it is not health, it is not roads, it is not ports, it is not electricity that is getting this allocation, it is the military.

In reality, the increase in military expenditure is not going to be limited to 11%. Last year, they raised the budget allocation by 14%, but by the end of the year they spent 20% more, which is a huge increase. It is an increase which is completely unnecessary, which is not warranted by the country's security needs.

This year too, instead of 11%, we are going to have a much larger increase even in that part of the military budget that is truly revealed. There are a lot of silent or invisible heads in the Indian defense budget and I would not be surprised if in the coming year too, we end up spending another 20% extra over the roughly 11 billion dollars we are already spending on the military. Incidentally, this is more than twice the amount that India's central government spends on health, education, social security and labour welfare put together!

So, we have seen that in economic terms too, nuclearization has been extremely harmful. If we actually go on to create nuclear weapons systems, they would prove utterly ruinous. Let us be very clear: nuclear weapons never replace conventional weapons, they always entail additional costs, huge costs.

In India, we have estimated, based on very conservative numbers put out by hawkish pro-nuclear lobbies, that to create a very small deterrent, to create a very small arsenal of nuclear weapons with command and control systems, which will be about a fifth of the size of China's nuclear arsenal, (maybe only an eighth of China's arsenal), it would cost us roughly 50,000 crores of rupees. That roughly 12 billions dollars over the next three to five years. This amount is exactly equivalent to what it would cost to put every child between the age of 6 and 14 into primary school in India.

The time, therefore, has come to ask ourselves what gives us more security, a literate population, a population that is not undernourished and starved, but has a stake in this society; or weapons of mass destruction that create distrust, discord, that are economically ruinous and strategically disastrous? And I think very large numbers of people in India and Pakistan have answered that question. They believe that we need real security which can come through economic prosperity and equity, through social cohesion, through communal harmony, through pluralism, through democracy and human rights, through social cohesion and justice. It cannot come through the creation of weapons of mass destruction.

Let me just share a little bit of information with you. In recent opinion polls, as many as 73% of all Indians -and this poll has been conducted in 13 different cities based on a very large sample - have said that they are opposed not only to the use but even to the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

The popular sentiment against nuclear weapons today is strong and growing. The reason is that the people realize that these weapons have no place in any rational scheme of defense, of security, of strategic planning. They are weapons of mass annihilation. They are, quintessentially, weapons of offence, and not weapons of defense. They have never given any country any security.

In fact, in India, we have an additional case against nuclear weapons, which is that for many years our own government under the policy first formulated by Jawaharlal Nehru, opposed the idea that nuclear weapons are essential for national security. In fact, as late as 1996, India officially argued that nuclear weapons have nothing to do with security; that the use of nuclear weapons, and even the threat of use of nuclear weapons is illegal, incompatible with international law, immoral. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence is an abhorrent doctrine.

The idea that by threatening your adversary with mass destruction, you can actually prevent a confrontation with him, is a bogus notion. This has never happened in history. We know that there were thousands of instances during the Cold War when the two great blocs, NATO of the West and the Warsaw Pact of the East, came close to a nuclear confrontation. There are at least 50 documented instances where nuclear weapons were actually alerted or almost fired, or were armed. It is a miracle that this actually did not happen.

General Lee Butler, who for more than a decade controlled the 30,000-plus nuclear weapons of the United States of America, as chief of the Strategic Command, has now disclosed that it was not nuclear deterrence, but the grace of God that prevented a nuclear conflagration time and again between the United States and the former Soviet Union. This is when they had literally thousands of different kinds of devices, permissive action links, computer codes that prevent the accidental use of nuclear weapons, and authorized use of nuclear weapons etc. They had many different kinds of early warning systems, they had hotlines at different levels, they had many protocols, many types of confidence-building measures (CBMs). So there was meant to be a certain level of confidence that a nuclear confrontation would not break out, that a missile fired from Russia was not actually meant to be hitting a target in the US, etc. In reality, that confidence was extremely low and it often broke down, especially in crisis situations.

What CBMs do we have in India and Pakistan? Nothing except a little agreement to exchange information about each other's missile tests. We have a hotline between the directors-general of military operations, which is not even activated every week, as it should be. For months on end, this hotline has not been used.

We know that in the Indian and Pakistani case, there have been hundreds of instances of so-called early warning systems' failing. This happened in May 1997 in your country. An Indian Air Force plane intruded into Pakistani airspace near Rawalpindi. Not only was it

not interrupted, it was not even properly detected. This is in spite of the fact that we have all kinds of air traffic control systems and military and civilian radar and so on and so forth.

The same thing happened in India: an airplane intruded across our western border in December 1995, it flew all the way to West Bengal, more than a thousand kilometers away and dropped a cargo of armaments. It was not intercepted or challenged even once. Ours are countries which cannot operate their electricity grids efficiently, that do not have decent roads, that cannot control very simple things. These are countries which are disastrous-prone.

In India and Pakistan, the rate of fatalities in road accidents is thirteen times higher than the world average. These are countries where bubonic plague—which everyone thought has been eradicated everywhere—breaks out, where people die of entirely preventable diseases. These are countries where the culture of safety is missing, virtually absent. These are disaster-prone societies.

The same engineers maintain and who build our roads and bridges that collapse, the same engineers that supervise the 147 Indian airforce planes that have crashed, build and manage our military hardware too. By the way, the amount of money we in India have lost since 1991 in the crashes of Indian Air Force's flying machines, is equivalent to its entire annual budget currently. Over one billion dollars, that is, the entire budget of the Indian Air Force annually. These losses take place regularly, with sickening frequency. It is the same engineers who supervise those systems who are building your bombs and ours.

Given this situation, what reliability are we going to have? zero, as far as I am concerned as a citizen. Look at India's experiment at an early warning system. Just two months ago, a special plane that was being devised for air surveillance operations crashed. It had a rotodome on top. The whole plane crashed. It was supposed to be the Indian military's "eye in the sky". It was supposed to be stationed in air to give you signals about missile flights,

about aircraft flights from a hostile neighbor. It crashed because the rotodome itself collapsed, killing four of the top scientists working on the early warning systems.

I will give you another example. The Department of Atomic Energy in India has the worst overall performance and the worst safety record of all departments of the government of India, the Public Works Department included. It has exposed thousands of workers to radiation doses well above permissible levels stipulated by the Department itself. It is this Department that is building our bombs! The DRDO (Defense Research and Development Organization) has never completed one project on time. I will give you an example. It has been working on our main battle tank. At the end of fifteen years, they do not have an engine for the tank! And they have already spent, according to the government, more than Rs.1,600 crores on developing the tanks. This is a joke!

The DRDO people also want to build a light combat aircraft on which they have spent more than Rs. 2,000 crores. Their entire deal is dependent upon the sale of one crucial component from the United States. That is the engine of the plane. Ok, so what do you get at the end of Rs. 2,000 crores? nothing. These are people whose levels of competence is abysmal.

The DRDO is building our missiles. I am scared for the people who are going to operate these missiles. In fact, the liquid fuel used in the Prithvi and Agni-I is so corrosive that any number of accidents can take place in fuelling the missile, transporting it, stationing it, positioning it, targeting it. I hope, I pray to God, that it is never used, never armed, never actually stationed and deployed anywhere.

The point I am making is that we cannot have a reliable system of management of nuclear weapons and missiles once they are in position, once they are deployed. The risks of accidents, the risks of disasters, the risks of unauthorized, illegitimate or unintended use are far too high. That is why we must not make them, that is why we must not induct them, and that is why we must not deploy them.

The peace movement should not advance the argument that we must stabilize the nuclear arms race. No, the real priority is to prevent it, to nip it in the bud, to make sure that India and Pakistan never actually make nuclear weapons, they do not make nuclear warheads or the delivery vehicles. They do not induct them, they do not station them, and they do not deploy them. I think that is why it is very important that we go beyond the kind of tokenist gestures of nuclear restraint that, for instance, the government of India is making on.

We all welcomed the Lahore summit and bus diplomacy. We were right to do so. But we must understand its limitations. One of the reasons why Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif met, I think, was precisely a tokenist one. We know that there were mainly three factors involved. One, there was international pressure to show that they are serious about conciliation and peace. Second, they had their own domestic rivals whom they wanted to out-manoeuvre by doing some kind of deal with each other. But thirdly, they also met because they knew that the peoples of the two countries are really fed up with war-mongering and the rhetoric of mutual hostility. They want peace, they want conciliation, they want normalcy, they want people-to-people exchanges, they want a return to sanity.

To show progress, Vajpayee and Sharif had to reach some kind of understanding about not carrying the nuclear arms race too far. So, India proposed a "no first use agreement", Pakistan rejected it. All they have agreed to do is to exchange information on two or three things. One is test flights of missiles that may take place. Secondly, to inform each other of possible accidents and disasters in respect of nuclear warheads and armaments. Three, to improve their regular military contacts.

This is something we in the peace movement must welcome. We must say it is good, but not good enough. It falls way below the minimum we need today. That minimum is a commitment never to test nuclear weapons, to stop and freeze missile development today,

to suspend all activities related to the advancement of nuclearization and missile development programs. We need to make a commitment, both unilaterally and bilaterally, *never to make or deploy nuclear weapons and also to return to the global disarmament agenda with sincerity of purpose.*

So let me conclude by saying that we in India and Pakistan are at a crossroads. We have two critical choices to make. I think at the end of ten months, we realize that both India and Pakistan have lost their global stature, have lost their diplomatic leverage. They have lowered their political image in their neighborhood, in the Third World, in the world as a whole. We know they have made terrible economic bargains and things will get even worse if they continue along the path of nuclearization. Contrary to the claims that have been made by so-called nuclear super-nationalists, India and Pakistan have in fact reduced their own diplomatic leverage viz. a viz. the United States.

Let me talk about one salient fact which most speakers have not mentioned. India and Pakistan decided to play the American game at the Conference on Disarmament soon after the tests last year. In July and August, they actively sabotaged the only form of resistance, the only barrier, that the Third World had created to the negotiations of a fissile material cut-off treaty, which the P-5, the nuclear weapons states want to be negotiated immediately. That barrier was in the form of a resolution of the Group of the Non-aligned. The Group of 21 in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva said that the FMCT negotiations would only start if the P-5 agree to put nuclear disarmament on the table. The Non-Aligned actually linked the FMCT negotiations with an eventual agreement on nuclear weapons elimination.

India and Pakistan were both party to this G-21 resolution. But the two acted as stooges of the United States and sabotaged the unity of the Third World. So today, they have become not defiant protestors against nuclear hegemony of the P-5 and the United States. *In fact, they have become the junior partners of the United States. They are*

competing with each other for a special, favored, position. They are courting the United States as they have never done before. So, nuclearization has achieved not the advancement of national sovereignty, but precisely its subversion.

We have to be clear that the way ahead lies not in the tokenist gestures, nor in defying the existing discriminatory nuclear order—apparently only to find a place within it on the side of the discriminators. The way ahead lies in transferring the nuclear order, away from its emphasis on non-proliferation to complete and total nuclear disarmament.

The second choice we have to make is also very clear. We have to move away from other tokenist gestures such as the Indian resolution in the UN on de-alerting of nuclear weapons. India proposes that we don't mate nuclear warheads with missiles. This is not good enough. De-alerting by the P-5 is very different from not putting Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons on alert. This Indian proposal actually makes a virtue out of necessity. We have to move away from this to a much more radical position.

Let me just propose a very simple idea and it is this. I think the logical thing for India and Pakistan to do is the following: they should both unilaterally and bilaterally say that for the next five years they will suspend all work on nuclear weapons, on design, on manufacturing, on refinement, on making warheads etc and also on missile development—provided the P-5 get down to reducing their nuclear arsenals by 50%, 80%, 90% in this period of time. This is the only way of recovering the leverage India and Pakistan lost. This is a good way of putting pressure on the major powers of the world to move rapidly towards nuclear disarmament. And it is a good way for us to return to the path of sanity, away from jingoism and nuclear muscle-flexing.

It seems to me that unless we make such a radical shift, we will lose an opportunity, a small, narrow window of opportunity, that still exists before us. If we lose that, we will court nothing but disaster.

So friends, let us go back from this conference with the determination that we will build movements at all levels—in schools, colleges and communities, in factories and farms, everywhere in our societies, our two countries. We will lobby parliamentarians, we will put pressure on them, and we will mobilize the public to say a categorical, unconditional and total no to nuclear weapons. We must never make, induct or deploy these weapons of mass destruction.

Thank you very much.