

Introduction of Speaker

Mary Beth Seminario, Social Justice Committee

This morning, sponsored by the Social Justice Committee, our guest speaker is Joseph Gerson, a man renowned internationally for his work for peace and injustice campaigns. He will be talking about the necessity of stopping nuclear proliferation and pursuing nuclear disarmament.

Dr. Gerson is currently Director of Programs and Director of the Peace and Economic Security Program for the American Friends Service Committee in New England. Some of this work involves supervising programs on a broad range of peace, social and economic justice programs. A Jewish man, born in the wake of the Holocaust, Joseph's parents taught him that the lessons of Judeocide were "Never again to anyone". This teaching shaped his life's work.

After graduating Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and earning a PhD. in Politics and International Security Studies from Union Institute and College his work has taken him from helping organize coal miners and their families in Kentucky to over 4 decades of work on peace and injustice issues. Through many years of work with the AFSC to his present specialization in the globalization of the U.S. military, the threatened use of nuclear weapons, and the US domination of the Middle East and Asia Pacific, Joseph Gerson has sought to make the world a safer place.

I am pleased to introduce Dr. Joseph Gerson

Nuclear Dangers and the Possibilities and Promises of Abolition

A talk given for the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst
by Joseph Gerson, Ph.D.

Friends, the organizers of this morning's service asked that I integrate today's reading into my sermon. So let me begin by reading from the testimony of Professor Shoji Swada, a Hiroshima A-bomb survivor.

When the atomic bomb was dropped I was 13 years old...at the moment of the bombing I was sleeping at home...I did not see the flash of the heat ray nor feel the shock wave of the blast. Everything happened instantaneously. When I came to my senses, I was trapped under my crushed house. I struggled...and at last I was able to crawl out of the piles of broken wood and plaster. When I stood upon my crushed house, the world I found was like night—the morning sunshine blocked by dark brown air that changed to yellow and then white, and finally became clear. At that moment, I was shocked to find that all the city of Hiroshima was flattened as far as I could see. I could not grasp what had happened. Immediately, I heard my mother call my name. Her voice seemed to come from far away, though I knew there was not much distance between her and me...her voice came from just under my feet....

My mother said that she was unable to move, that her legs were caught between big beams or pillars. I tried with all my might to pull away these beams or pillars. But it was far beyond my ability. I called out in vain to adults for help, but those wounded could do nothing more than find a safe place for themselves.... When I told my mother of the approaching fires, she told me, "You should survive; you should become a good person by studying well...." [Then] she said, "That's enough, never mind your mother. Get away from here!" I hesitated in leaving my mother. But when a large fire storm arose, my mother said, "Get away right now." It seemed faint, but it was strong, and so I could decide to leave without her. As I escaped, I said, "Forgive me, mother!" That was the last time I spoke with my mother.

There was no road, and amid the flames and smoke I could see only piles of houses, and badly burned people escaping. Their burned skin was hanging down from their chins or nails.... At last I reached the riverside, swam across the river, and sat on the dry riverbed watching the burning town from the other side... When I thought of my mother beneath the flames, my heart was broken, and I thought, "Was there not something I could have done to save her?" Even now, the same feeling comes over me whenever I think of my mother.

...[I am a] survivor who had experienced the disaster of that day. Now about 280,000 survivors of atomic bombing in Japan, Korea and in other countries are still struggling against physical, living and mental difficulties which grow harder with age. In the world, including USA, the former Soviet Union, and other nuclear weapon states, [there are] more than several million victims of radiation caused from the whole processes from uranium mining to weapon production, such as people down wind from nuclear tests. For survivors of the atomic bombing, it is obvious that using nuclear weapons is the most inexcusable crime in human history. It should never be used against anyone, for any purpose and any reason, and upon anywhere....

I appeal that it is the time to abolish nuclear weapons for the future human beings.

I want to thank Chad Johnson and Mary Beth Seminario for the opportunity to be with you today. My wife and I stayed at a bed and breakfast last night, and this morning as breakfast a woman from Texas asked what we were doing in Amherst. We told her that I was to give the sermon at the Unitarian Church, and I said that it certainly wouldn't be fire and brimstone. Then I thought about it a little more. You can't talk about nuclear weapons and nuclear war without talking about fire and brimstone.

Unitarian Churches have had a special place in my imagination since I first wandered into a Unitarian service in Washington, D.C. forty years ago. There I was profoundly moved by the sermon given by a visiting minister from the German Free Church. With reason and appropriate passion, he described the German catastrophes of the 20th century to help us U.S. Americans better understand the nature and

consequences of the Vietnam War. Still etched in my mind are his words about young Germans marching off to the First World War with their belt buckles engraved with the slogan "God on our side". And, he reminded the congregation that 20 years later, moved by the myths of German superiority, the Third Reich committed crimes beyond comprehension, along the way laying waste to a continent, and to their nation.

When we recall the nuclear annihilations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the three million Vietnamese killed during the U.S. war on their nation, the estimated two million Iraqis who have died as a result of the decade long sanctions regime and these eight years of war and occupation, and that on more than forty occasions since the Nagasaki A-bombing our government has prepared and threatened to initiate nuclear war, we need to be somewhat humble in judging and engaging other nations.

We have had conflicting news during the past two weeks about nuclear weapons. On the positive side, the London Times reported that President Obama is moving quickly to negotiate deep cuts in the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, down to 1,000 genocidal hydrogen bombs each, and it has also been reported that in December he sent Henry Kissinger to open negotiations with Moscow. Elsewhere, Hillary Clinton has reaffirmed our new government's willingness to enter into broadly based negotiations with Iran.

On the other hand, even as they cut back money in the economic stimulus package to assist states in meeting human needs, senators have outrageously included \$1 billion to modernize and expand the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure. At the same time, *Time Magazine* has reported that we are already in the midst of the first nuclear showdown of Barack Obama's presidency. It's not between the U.S. and Russia or India and Pakistan. It is between the President and his Secretary of Defense Robert Gates over whether the U.S. should be building a new generation of nuclear weapons misnamed the Reliable Replacement Warhead to calm public fears.

More is at stake here than the profits and jobs involved in building and maintaining nuclear weapons. The outcomes of the political battle over the stimulus package and of the Obama-Gates confrontation will influence whether or not our new president can fulfill his stated commitment to "move toward meaningful reductions and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons" and thus gain the legitimacy needed to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Let me take a moment to explain why I used Shoji Swada's A-bomb testimony as this morning's reading. My hope was to reduce the abstractions about what nuclear weapons are and to provide a more intimate understanding of what they do to people like us. As I thought about it, I also realized that I want his spirit to permeate my words, what you hear from me today. Professor Sawada, who I have known for 25 years, remains haunted by the deaths and suffering he witnessed and by his failure to save his mother. Like other Hibakusha, the A-bomb victims, his memories have led him to dedicate his life to the abolition of what many Hibakusha call "weapons of the Devil" and to do so with a depth of commitment that few of us can conceive let alone emulate.

If we study our history, we know that the first A-bombings were unnecessary and indeed criminal by the standards of international law. Nearly every U.S. military leader at the time, from Generals Eisenhower and LeMay to Secretary of War Simpson, understood that Japan was defeated, and that its surrender in Admiral Leahy's words, "could be negotiated on terms acceptable to the United States." With the criteria for the A-bomb's targets requiring that they be cities "with densely packed workers' homes," civilians were targeted indiscriminately. We know now that the A-bombs had more to do with gaining strategic advantage over the Soviet Union than with defeating Japan.

The Hiroshima A-bomb was detonated above the Shima hospital. Its fireball was 750 feet across and burned with 3 million degrees of heat - that of the sun. In the first second, people within a two mile radius of the A-bomb were irradiated, resulting in death and sickness for hundreds of thousands of people, men, women and children. The entire city was destroyed in nine seconds. People, school buildings, the shopping district and a public park in the immediate vicinity were vaporized.

Nine years later, after the U.S. had prepared and threatened to initiate nuclear war during the first Berlin Crisis, during a confrontation over Iran, and repeatedly during the Korean War, the Pentagon conducted a hydrogen bomb test over Bikini atoll. That bomb, a prototype for our country's current arsenal of more than 5,000 H-bombs, had a fireball with the heat of the sun, but was two miles across. And, as US military authorities knew, the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, resulting in the irradiation and deaths of many Marshall Islanders, Japanese fishermen, and their offspring, some of whom came into the world as mutated jelly babies.

Joseph Rotblat, the one senior scientist who quit the Manhattan Project for moral reasons, once explained that humans face a stark choice. We can either completely eliminate all nuclear weapons, or there will be global nuclear proliferation with the cataclysmic wars that will inevitably follow. Why? Because no nation will long tolerate what it experiences as an unjust imbalance of power, in this case imbalance of terror.

One consequence of this reality is that following the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombings there was a predictable chain reaction, the Soviets developed their first atomic bomb by 1949. As its reward for helping the U.S. develop its nuclear arsenal, Britain was given the bomb. Fearing both the US and Soviet bombs, China developed its minimum deterrent nuclear force. France, anxious to retain a seat at the big powers' table, built its bombs in collaboration with Israel. India, concerned about China and Pakistan, developed its first nuclear weapons in the 1970s, and demonstrated its capabilities in 1998. Pakistan, fearing India, responded with nuclear weapons tests with tests of its own. And recently, after being the target of nearly a dozen U.S. nuclear threats, North Korea conducted its first, albeit fizzled, nuclear weapons test.

Think about it. Nuclear weapons technology is now 60 years old. Any recently minted nuclear physicist should know how to design a nuclear weapon. More than thirty-five nations with nuclear power plants have the theoretical capability to become nuclear powers.

Fortunately, a number of countries which initially pursued becoming nuclear powers or inherited nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union collapsed wisely turned away from this Promethean nightmare. Among them are Sweden, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Libya, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus.

Along with President Obama, we are the inheritors of a conflicted history of arms control and of international campaigns for nuclear weapons abolition. For the most part, arms controllers have reinforced the hierarchy of nuclear terror, negotiating the terms for the next iterations of arms races. And, since the adoption of the UN General Assembly's first resolution, abolitionists have been clear that no nukes are good nukes, and that they must all be eliminated. Of course, you can't get to abolition without arms control, and as a result the distinctions between the two have often been confused.

[As early as the McCloy-Zorin Agreement, negotiated in the first year of the Kennedy Administration, the essential steps through arms control to abolition were identified. Two years later, following the nearly catastrophic Cuban Missile crisis, the ban on atmospheric nuclear testing was negotiated to calm public opinion and to halt the world-wide poisoning of mother's milk. Yet, until the end of the cold war, as one arms control agreement followed another, the number of nuclear weapons grew to 30,000. Despite post-Cold War reductions, we still have quite enough nuclear weapons to bounce the rubble and bring on life-ending nuclear winter.]

A seminal step along the ambiguous arms control-abolition path was the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Together with the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I and the Yalta Agreement which divided Europe at the end of the Second World War, it was one of the 20th century's most important deals.

The NPT has three essential pillars. First, non-nuclear nations, with the exceptions of India, Pakistan and Israel, agreed to foreswear becoming nuclear powers. In exchange, in Article IV, the nuclear weapons states granted non-nuclear nations the right to develop and use nuclear power for energy purposes, something Iranian and North Korean diplomats will tell you is their inalienable right. And, in Article VI, the nuclear powers, led by the U.S., pledged to move forthrightly to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

The NPT has been remarkably successful in stemming nuclear weapons proliferation, even as the cases of Iraq, North Korea, and Iran illuminate the need to tighten the inspection regime. But, as figures as varied as Mohammed El Baradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Christopher Weeramantry of the International Court of Justice, and President Ahmaedinejad remind us, the nuclear powers have hypocritically failed to fulfill their Article VI abolition commitment. Why? John Deutch, Bill Clinton's second CIA Director once put it this way: "The United States never intended, nor does it intend now to implement Article VI. That's just something you have to say to get what you want from a conference."

Imagine then the shock, and the hopes that began to arise two years ago when, former Republican Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Democratic Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Senator Sam Nunn wrote the first of two articles in the *Wall Street Journal* warning that the U.S. nuclear double standard had outlived its usefulness and is undermining U.S. national security. Arguing that U.S. nuclear hypocrisy has become a force driving the proliferation of nuclear weapons that could be used against the United States, they urged the U.S. to make deeper cuts in the size of its nuclear arsenal, to negotiate a range of arms control agreements, and to commit itself to implementing Article VI of the NPT.

Then, during the presidential primaries, encouraged by this elite manifesto and pressed from below by concerned activists in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and other states, Barack Obama publicly committed to work for nuclear weapons abolition. This commitment was reiterated in the Democratic Party's platform, and since coming to office President Obama has again pledged "to move toward meaningful reductions and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons."

As we have been reminded by our still deepening economic crisis, we cannot simply wish our way from here to the Golden Day. Stubborn historical dynamics and vested interests reinforce the status quo, and this applies to nuclearism. Let me review an index of today's most compelling nuclear dangers, saving what I think to be the most dangerous for last.

The nuclear weapons production cycle, the mining and milling of uranium, the generation of nuclear power, and the production of nuclear weapons have poisoned millions of people in our country and in other nuclear nations. Here thousands of uranium miners, down winders, and atomic veterans have lost their lives and those of family members on the alter empire enforced by threats of nuclear annihilation.

In recent years leading Republicans and Democrats alike have warned that the greatest nuclear danger is that non-state terrorists, perhaps Al Qaeda, will obtain nuclear weapons. This danger is real. In the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when poverty and corruption were rife, some nuclear materials disappeared from insecure storage sites. It is, however, one thing to obtain uranium or even plutonium, and quite another to make a bomb. A more immediate but lesser danger is from a dirty bomb that can be made by wrapping low grade radioactive industrial waste around sticks of dynamite. The resulting explosion would not be a mushroom cloud, but it would spread low level radiation over several city blocks. Imagine the political and economic fallout of such a bomb being detonated on Wall Street or near the U.S. capitol.

Across the planet, the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai reminds us of the continuing struggle over Kashmir and that geostrategic competition between India and Pakistan could spark a war that escalates to a nuclear exchange. Such threats were made a decade ago during the 1999 Kargil War.

There is the danger of an accidental thermonuclear exchange. This is a fate we have narrowly avoided several times, for example when Soviet radar mistook a flock of geese and the launching of a Norwegian weather satellite for U.S. first strike attacks, or when U.S. technicians inserted the wrong file into a Strategic Air Command computer.

During the first days of the 1973 October War, when Israel was initially on the defensive, Gold Meir threatened to unleash her "Temple Weapons." Were an Israeli attack on Iran's nascent nuclear infrastructure to escalate to missile exchanges, what would happen if what Israelis call "the boss" were to go truly mad.

It is not in Iran's national interest to use its nuclear infrastructure to create and deploy nuclear weapons. Using such weapons against Israel or U.S. interests would result in the annihilation of Persia and its civilization, and were Teheran to obtain a nuclear weapon, proliferation across the Sunni Arab world would soon follow, making Iran's security situation that much worse. That said, Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs point to the growing dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation that Shultz, Kissinger and others warn us about.

And, as we learned during the Cuban missile crisis, and more recently with the supposedly impossible flight of six nuclear armed missiles across the United States from North Dakota to Louisiana, Presidents and Prime Ministers do not have complete control over their nations' nuclear arsenals. Rogue generals and admirals, even in the Pentagon or in New Delhi, Moscow or Beijing can escalate nuclear confrontations that can lead to misjudgments and nuclear catastrophe.

This said, I nonetheless believe that the greatest dangers lie here in the United States, and that we must do all that we can to ensure that President Obama enjoys the pressure from below that will allow him to confront the nuclear hawks in the Pentagon, Congress, and elsewhere in our society.

Most immediately there is the danger of a new Cold War with Russia. Presidents Clinton and Bush, forgetting Moscow's deep historical fears of invasion from the West, mistakenly frightened the Kremlin by expanding NATO to Russia's borders. Then, W. Bush moved to deploy misnamed "missile defenses" in the Czech Republic and Poland, ostensibly to protect Europe from non-existent Iranian missiles, but as Moscow understands it, to build the first stage of a shield designed to reinforce the U.S. first strike nuclear sword. I am sorry to have to report that this weekend, at the Munich Security Conference, Vice President Biden has reiterated the United States' intention to deploy this first strike system in Europe. Together, these actions threaten to ignite a new and very dangerous arms race in Europe.

Fortunately, announcing that it was suspending the commissioning of 70 new missiles to be based in Kaliningrad, Moscow has provided Obama the opportunity to reverse the Pentagon's course, even as it increases pressure on Washington in Central Asia.

I believe the greatest nuclear danger may lie in the possibility that, as President Obama courts the Pentagon, he may find himself in the position of not being able to challenge Secretary of War Gates during his first year in office. In such case, President Obama may back away from his commitments not to build new nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, nuclear hawks have been rallying their forces. A recent Pentagon panel created by Secretary Gates and headed by Nixon's Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger – yes, I am afraid that Nixon's ghost is still with us - warned that senior U.S. military officials "fail to understand the value of [nuclear] deterrence." Others, including John Deutch and Harold Brown, Jimmy Carter's Defense Secretary, have challenged the Kissinger, Schultz, Perry, Nunn initiative, arguing that abolition is a dangerous mirage that will increase U.S. vulnerability.

This is nonsense, but it is reported uncritically in the U.S. media. As the Pentagon's Defense Policy Guidance" put it, "The central focus of deterrence is for one nation to exert such influence over a potential adversary's decision process that the potential adversary makes a deliberate choice to refrain from a COA [course of action]." What does this mean? It means that the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombings were acts of deterrence, that Bush Senior and Junior's nuclear threats against Iraq, Bill Clinton's nuclear threats against North Korea, China and Libya, and the W. Bush-Hillary Clinton imperative that "all options must be on the table" in dealing with Iran should all be understood as acts of deterrence.

Why would building new nuclear weapons be so dangerous? There are two inter-related reasons.

First, it would signal a continuing U.S. commitment to nuclear enforced U.S. "full spectrum dominance," telling the world that we really haven't divorced ourselves from Bush and Cheney's nationally self-destructive "romance of ruthlessness."

Second, were we to reaffirm the model and belief that security grows from the threat to inflict nuclear genocide, we would weaken the international campaign for a successful NPT Review conference in 2010 at a time when the Bush Administration has left the NPT highly vulnerable.

Please be patient with a mite of wonkery as I move to my conclusion. In 1995, when the NPT was due to expire, President Clinton forced through its indefinite extension in order to preserve U.S. nuclear dominance. Non nuclear states would remain nuclear free, while the nuclear powers retained their arsenals and occasionally gave lip service to Article VI. As the deal went down, non-nuclear states extracted a commitment from the U.S. and its nuclear peers: a review conference must be held every five years as a way to hold the nuclear powers accountable to Article VI.

In 2000, as the NPT Review conference - and thus the NPT itself - veered toward collapse, a group of mid-level powers called the New Agenda Coalition [Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, Slovenia and South Africa and Sweden,] extracted an "irrevocable

commitment" from the U.S. and other nuclear powers to implement Article VI and to take thirteen agreed steps toward its implementation. These included, among others, negotiation and ratification of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and fissile material cut off (non-production) treaty.

After making these commitments, Bill Clinton's ambassador to the Review Conference predicted that they would never be fulfilled, and W. Bush did his best to prove him right. By outrageously refusing even to agree to an agenda for the 2005 Review Conference until it was half over, and otherwise blocking any progress, the last review conference collapsed in failure. The NPT order was left in near shambles, and it is widely understood that if the 2010 Review Conference fails humanity will face widespread nuclear weapons proliferation.

So what can we do to preserve the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and to remove nuclear dangers by actually winning the abolition of nuclear weapons? Let me stress that even as the dangers are many, forces within the U.S. and internationally have never been as close to turning the many draft abolition treaties into binding agreements as they are today. But the last miles of this journey may be the most challenging.

We do well to remember that it was citizen actions that ended Jim Crow segregation and made Barack Obama's election possible. It was a range of activities from writing letters to local newspapers and to Congress to challenging nuclear submarines with canoes that led to the first limited test ban treaty. And it was the nuclear freeze movement, begun here in Massachusetts, that roused our nation and forced President Reagan to negotiate the arms control treaty that ended the Cold War. It was popular pressure that led the Republican dominated Congress to repeatedly refuse funding for the misnamed Reliable Replacement Warhead that Secretary Gates is still pressing for. And it was citizens like you who repeatedly confronted presidential primary candidates in New Hampshire, including Barack Obama, demanding to know if they would honor Article VI of the NPT.

Instead of ending on a rhetorical high note, let me suggest simple but very meaningful steps that we can take.

Think about your various friendship circles and the groups of people in schools, religious hierarchies, work places and community groups. Think about what you can do to help them understand the continuing nuclear dangers and the imperative of fulfilling Professor Sawada's vision of a nuclear free world.

Tomorrow make your phone calls to Senator Kerry's office urging him to strip the \$1 billion for the nuclear weapons infrastructure from the stimulus bill, and demand that Congress continue refusing to fund first strike missile defenses or the development of new nuclear weapons. He and other members of Congress need to hear from us.

In a period when peace organizations, like everyone else, are struggling for their economic survival, consider if you can make a financial contribution to an organization you respect that is working to ensure that President Obama lives up to his commitments.

And, do what you can to educate people about the importance of the NPT Review Conference at the United Nations in June, 2010. Encourage them to plan to join the thousands of people who will be coming from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa with the demand that the nuclear weapons states finally free us from what President Kennedy termed the "nuclear sword of Damocles." Miles Horton, who had a little something to do with Rosa Parks' decision to stay seated at the front of that bus, wrote that we make the road by walking.

Friends, the weather is warming, and it's time to hit that road.

* Dr. Joseph Gerson is Director of Programs and Director of the Peace and Economic Security Program of the American Friends Service Committee in New England. His most recent book is *Empire and the Bomb: How the US Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World*.

** Shoji Sawada: a theoretical particle physicist and an emeritus professor of Nagoya University, and a Representative Director of Japan Council against A&H Bombs (Gensuikyo)