

“Honouring Women”

**Global Zero Leadership Breakfast
GZ/DC Youth Conference**

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Good Morning!

Thank you for the invitation to speak. And I would like, first of all, to congratulate the Global Zero team for organizing such a fine and successful event. It is wonderful to be here amongst this vital and inspiring meeting of bright young people committed to a better world.

I am honoured to participate in this panel and pleased that Global Zero is bringing into focus the importance of women as agents of change. When I agreed to become a Founding Partner of Global Zero one of my hopes was that women would be well represented in the Global Zero movement.

The Global Zero goal to encourage women to work in the restoration of the nuclear disarmament movement - together with the strong and growing youth movement of both young women and men - can only add to Global Zero's success in pursuing a world without nuclear weapons by 2030.

For more than a century women have been an active force in working for peace and disarmament. The original Mother's Day Proclamation - written in 1870 by politically active Julia Ward Howe - was "an impassioned call for peace and disarmament" - a reaction to the carnage of the Civil War.

Women have played an important and effective role in the global nuclear disarmament movement since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They have participated as individuals, in groups, and many within women-specific organizations in active opposition to nuclear weapons.

Because of time constraints I will not talk of such actions as the spread across the globe of women's peace camps and other activities. I will focus on an American experience with positive global implications.

Early mobilizations in the 1950s were the responses to atmospheric nuclear testing. And women drew on their experience as mothers as both justification and motivation behind their activism. For example, in the 1950s, women discovered that the breast milk they were feeding their babies was contaminated with traces of Radio-active Strontium 90.

A successful civil movement of predominantly young mothers -and one very important for nuclear disarmament - was the 1958 St. Louis Baby-Teeth Survey. The testing of baby teeth of children, born between 1945 and 1965, showed levels of Radio-active Strontium 90 that had risen a 100-fold; and rose and fell in correlation with atomic bomb tests. The resulting campaign, to ban testing, acted as a spur to President Kennedy to negotiate a treaty to ban nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in space, and in the water.

In 2001 a set of 85,000 of these teeth was discovered in storage at Washington University. The teeth were given to the [Radiation and Public Health Project](#) which then tracked the individuals who had participated in the tooth-collection project. The results are quite disturbing. They showed that *those children who later died of cancer before*

the age of 50 had levels of strontium 90 in their stored baby teeth that was *twice the level* of those who were still alive at age 50.

The problem with nuclear weapons is that all of us - *men, women and children* - are collateral damage in a nuclear incident whether from a nuclear war, an accident, an accidental or malicious launch of a nuclear weapon, or from those ticking time bombs like Chernobyl and now Fukushima, whose radiation effects are currently terrifying so many people around the world.

After the Cold War, the large women's organizations - along with the disarmament movement - diminished in size and some have disappeared - though protests have continued - many of them quite radical - but effective - in bringing attention to the continuing existence and the danger of nuclear weapons *which an amazing number of people had assumed were eliminated at the end of the Cold War.*

My own experience as an educator, advocate, activist and funder for nuclear disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear weapons, began because of my concerns as a mother.

In the early 1980s, we in Vancouver, Canada, were living in a climate of nuclear fear. The United States, despite huge civil society protests, established a nuclear weapons base on Vancouver Island, across the water from Vancouver. As well, there was a US nuclear submarine base 80 miles – as the crow flies – from Vancouver.

A local newspaper published a map of the city of Vancouver as a target with circles defining the devastating effects. I was a University student marching in the streets protesting this situation.

I was horrified because my young daughter was having nightmares about nuclear war. I established The Simons Foundation when I was in Graduate School, in 1985 because of my concern for my daughter. I wondered if fear of nuclear weapons had become part of the psyche of young people in North America and began to research on the subject. I found two psychological studies - one of kindergarten age children and one of college students. In their discussions with the psychologists none of these young people mentioned nuclear war as a conscious concern but in reporting their dreams, nuclear war featured in all of these young peoples' dreams.

The first grant I made from the Foundation was to endow a doctoral fellowship for women in physics, imagining – naively and chauvinistically, perhaps – that a woman researching in physics would be a Madame Curie – seeking medical applications - rather than an Edward Teller – whose lifelong focus was in advancing thermonuclear weapons and the hydrogen bomb.

For 26 years I have continued to work as an education, advocate, activist and a funder for the elimination of nuclear weapons. And this is why I am a Founding Partner of Global Zero. I believe Global Zero is the organization with the best plan, and the one most likely to achieve my goal.

Concern about the issue has died away since the end of the Cold War. The dangers have

remained, and have, in fact, become more complex and thus accelerate the danger. Though the relations between the United States and Russia remain friendly, the two countries maintain their Cold War nuclear war plan, and the nuclear forces are poised - on alert for immediate launch.

Furthermore, since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons states has grown, **nuclear capable** states have grown in number, nuclear technology is proliferating and is also trafficked illegally, and terrorists are seeking acquisition to nuclear materials and nuclear weapons.

So it is more important than ever to revive the flagging civil movements and to raise the awareness of the dangers to which every person is subject. Global Zero's plan to encourage women to return to this issue of enormous concern - and to be in the forefront as they were in the past - is a welcome one. Women were in the forefront before. And with new opportunities to be in the halls of power – a rare occurrence in the past – they will be again.

It was gratifying to see the US Delegation at the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Women were predominant. The Delegation was headed by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and key roles were played by Under Secretary of State, Ellen Tauscher, Ambassador Susan Burk and Dr. Rose Gottemoeller, chief United States negotiator for the recent US – Russia START Treaty.

Global Zero has attracted equally intelligent, politically bright, and courageous women. A few are rare beings from a generation in which it was difficult for women to attain these positions of power: To name some - **Mary Robinson**, former President of Ireland; **Vaira Vike Freiberga**, former President of Latvia, **Gro Harlem Bruntlandt**, former Prime Minister of Norway, **Margot Walstrom**, Vice President of the European Commission; some are Members and former Members of Parliament from countries such as India Pakistan, Germany, United Kingdom and Spain – some with Cabinet positions, one as Chair of Disarmament and Arms Control Parliamentary Committee; one as Advisor on nuclear disarmament to the Prime Minister, another Minister of Foreign Affairs. And two highly courageous women I must mention – **Sherry Rehman**, Member of Parliament in Pakistan whose life is in extreme danger but who insists on remaining in the country and maintaining her views. And the other is this beautiful woman beside me, **Valerie Plame** Wilson former CIA officer.

Global Zero will continue to encourage women to join the Global Zero movement and bring the concern, energy and spirit which made the women's movement for nuclear disarmament successful in the past.

Thank you very much.

Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D.