

GLOBAL ZERO STUDENT SUMMIT
Yale University

February 18-19th, 2012

Remarks

Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D
President,
The Simons Foundation

My name is Jennifer Allen Simons. I am President of The Simons Foundation, Founding Partner and Principal Sponsor of Global Zero. This is my first visit to Yale University. And I find it very exciting to be here today especially, because we were expecting group of one hundred. And here am I standing in front of three hundred and fifty students; and twelve representing countries outside the United States - a breath of new life into - what I believe is - the most critical issue of our time and one which provides hope for the future of a nuclear weapon free world.

I, too, was a University student when I began to work on the issue. It was in the early 1980s during the Reagan build-up of nuclear weapons and I marched with students and professors from my university. Even without Twitter and Facebook as mobilization motivators, over one hundred thousand participated in our first march in Vancouver. These marches, which took place in many parts of the world – one million in New York, one million at The Hague, three million in Europe to name some – were effective forms of protest and played a large part in the decisions of Gorbachev and Reagan to eliminate nuclear weapons.

I was in graduate school when my daughter began having nightmares about nuclear war so I decided it was necessary to do more than just march as a form of protest. And, in 1985, I established The Simons Foundation with a mandate to work against the negative effects of technology - specifically to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

I chose, as a Mission Statement, a quotation from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *Ulysses*:
"Come My Friends 'tis not too late to seek a Newer World."

So I say to you now, twenty-seven years later when I am no longer a young mother but, in fact, a positively ancient grandmother: ***"Come My Friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world."***

It is past time to ***wake up*** America to the reality of nuclear dangers – to the reality of what a nuclear weapon is; to the reality that we are threatened every day of our lives by the possibility of a devastating nuclear accident; to the reality of an accidental or malicious launch of nuclear weapons; or their acquisition by terrorists; and the potential for a catastrophe of a magnitude far, ***far*** greater than the 9/11 terrorist attack.

It is essential that people understand ***why*** nuclear weapons should be eliminated – not just because they are redundant Cold War weapons but because ***their very existence*** poses great danger to humans. This is our task – to educate the public on the nature of these armaments.

The technology for depicting war to the general public has been deliberately developed in order to give ***no*** rise to moral outrage. The United States learned its lesson from Vietnam where televised images of the war entered the living rooms of America. So that television depiction of the Iraq war was essentially a computerized simulation of attack and defence strategies in which warriors and their thousands of civilian casualties were completely absent.

The technology for fighting war has become so sophisticated that one person, safe from harm himself, has the ability to kill hundreds. Or in the case of the nuclear warriors in the secret underground missile silos with their weapons – millions - with absolutely no connection to the result of his actions. The abstract nature of this kind of war breeds alienation so that these individuals can - with no moral reservations or reflection - kill with impunity. It is easy to understand then why the general public appears to pay little regard to these issues.

Americans have never known the true story of its use of nuclear weapons. However, fifty years after dropping the two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the opportunity arose for the true story to be told.¹

To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Hiroshima – in 1995 - the Smithsonian Museum in Washington planned an exhibit of *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Martin Harwit, Director of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, “was determined to explore the full story of the atomic bombings”, although he was concerned that “fifty years may not be enough time to prepare the nation to confront such a history.”² And he was proven to be correct. Photographs included in the display - privately taken by the US Army official photographer, (Joe O’Donnell), and locked away in a trunk because they so disturbed him - were so horrifying there were tremendous objections. One photograph depicted a classroom of children sitting at their desks burnt to cinders.

There was such controversy in the media, from the Congress, and from veteran associations, who wanted only photographs of the mushroom cloud - yet argued that the exhibition was one-sided – and, with the support of President Clinton, the *Enola Gay* exhibit was cancelled. Americans were judged not ready to face the truth about what they had done - or better said – what had been done in their name. Americans, generally, have never known the truth about Hiroshima.

It very important to educate people about what a nuclear weapon actually is and does. And nuclear weapons ought not to be viewed as in the same class as conventional weapons. The late Hans Morgenthau, (Professor of Political Science at University of Chicago and City University New York), warns that it is a fallacy to think conventionally about nuclear weapons. He argues that after Hiroshima the symbolic systems and linguistic tools that were appropriate to describe weapons of war prior to Hiroshima are redundant; and that our linguistic tools are insufficient and sometimes seriously misleading.

Weapons of war prior to Hiroshima, he says, were tools of engagement between two warring parties after which one would be defeated and the other emerge the winner - "a rational relationship between a means, an instrument and an end." In his view, to refer to nuclear instruments and their utilization as weapons of war is resorting to euphemisms.

¹ Robert Jay Lifton & Greg Mitchell. *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*, 1995, 273

² -ibid-, 284

A nuclear device, he says, is not a weapon but "an instrument of unlimited, universal destruction"; nuclear war is not war, but - to quote him, "suicide and genocide.... a self-defeating absurdity".³

The world has been sleepwalking through the many warning signs which "were consistently ignored"; and we are now in the situation, where technologies of mass destruction are rapidly becoming more and more accessible; and we are in the position in which one group - either state or terrorist - can destroy the life of all on this planet.⁴

It is difficult for the human mind to grasp this. Psychiatrist, Robert Jay Lifton, specialist in issues of weapons of mass destruction, explains the phenomenon as "*psychic numbing*". My friend, Jonathan Schell, in *The Fate of the Earth*, writes that it is anathema to conceive of one's own death.

We have the good news that President Obama is considering a dramatic reduction of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This does not mean that we can sit back yet, and believe we are on the way to zero. For one thing, three hundred U.S. weapons, with an equal number in reserve, combined with the arsenals of Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, Pakistan and India, are still enough to incinerate us all.

Moreover, this leaked information is only that. It is not a reality – and I see that our immediate task is to make it a reality.

In the meantime, I imagine there will be a tremendous backlash from the nuclear industry, their lobbyists will be banging on all the doors of Congress. This leaked information is fodder for negative election campaigning. However, I am ever the optimist and hope that President Obama takes his constitutional right – his Presidential Nuclear Initiative - and like George H.W. Bush in the 1990s -makes deep cuts the nuclear arsenal.

For this newer world I am seeking, we have our work to do to make a cut to three hundred weapons the next stepping stone on the path to zero. And it is wonderful to have so many of you young, interested, and concerned people here to apply your intelligence and energy in order to bring this about.

Your presence breathes new life into this very important issue, and provides encouragement to those of us who have been actively attempting to rid the world of these weapons for so many years. I am not yet ready to hand over my baton. However, your presence here has made me confident that I could do so.

Thank you!

³ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Fallacy of Thinking Conventionally About Nuclear Weapons", *Arms Control and Technological Innovation*, ed. David Carlton & Carlo Schaerf, 1977, 2pp. 255

⁴ Stanley I. Greenspan & Stuart Shanker, *The First Idea*, 2004, 426-7.

In a moment I will pass over to my good friend, Dr. Hans Blix for the Closing Remarks for today's sessions. Hans Blix chaired the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. And I was fortunate to have worked with him and his team, in an organizational capacity, and as the private sponsor of this Commission.

Several years ago, on behalf of Simon Fraser University, I invited Hans Blix to take up the Simons Visiting Chair in International Law and Human Security. And he declined, saying that he had too much to do in the world before he was ready to settle in one place – even for a few months. And since then he has proven that it would have been a mistake for him. He has been travelling the world; giving of his experience; writing; and speaking at every opportunity.

And last year he underwent quite a grilling in the United Kingdom's inquiry into the Iraq War. He was steadfast in his view that the invasion of Iraq was illegal and that - as the United Nations' former chief weapons inspector - if he had been given more time, he would have demonstrated that Iraq had destroyed its weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Gulf War. And that no weapons of mass destruction remained in Iraq. So here is this fully committed steadfast, exemplary man. And we are happy that he is taking a leading role in Global Zero. Hans.....

END

Jennifer Allen Simons
President,
The Simons Foundation

February 18th, 2010