

STRANGE SPECTACLE: NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT 2016

Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy
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At the invitation of President Obama, on April 1 more than 50 leaders of countries, including all states possessing nuclear arsenals except Russia and North Korea, gathered in Washington for the fourth Nuclear Security Summit. The focus was on securing civilian highly enriched uranium (HEU) and similar modest and voluntary steps aimed at preventing terrorists from acquiring nuclear and radiological weapons. HEU intended for use in civilian nuclear reactors is a small fraction of the total amount of weapons-usable HEU and plutonium in the world.

It was a strange spectacle indeed to have so much political capital invested in limited measures which do not address:

- the estimated 15,000-plus nuclear weapons in the possession of states which say they are prepared to use them; there are no safe hands, state or non-state, for these horrific devices
- the large stocks of HEU and plutonium in military programs
- the large stocks of reactor-grade but weapons-usable plutonium
- ongoing production of HEU and plutonium and construction of new reprocessing plants to yield plutonium

The contrast is stark with the global negotiations on prevention of climate change that culminated in the Paris Agreement last December. While that agreement is only a start, at least those negotiations acknowledged the reality of climate change and sought to address the entire threat.

Also remarkable and deplorable is that the United States and the other nuclear-armed states are boycotting the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Taking Forward Multilateral Negotiations on Nuclear Disarmament. Established by the General Assembly with the support of 138 countries, the Working Group is charged with discussing legal measures and norms needed to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.

The United States and five other nuclear-armed states (France, Russia, China, Israel, North Korea) have additionally refused the Marshall Islands' invitation to appear in the International Court of Justice to defend their compliance with the obligation, under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and customary international law, to pursue in good faith negotiations on the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Only the nuclear-armed states which have accepted the general jurisdiction of the Court, the United Kingdom, India, and Pakistan, are defending their records before the Court in cases brought by the Marshall Islands.

The world would have been far safer if this had been the fourth Nuclear *Abolition* Summit. It is past time for the United States, Russia, and other states to embrace and urgently implement a broader agenda to achieve without delay a world free of nuclear weapons.