

'An Ottawa/Oslo Process for nuclear weapons and other grassroots initiatives'

Summary of the presentation by Mary Wareham, Coordinator, Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition, and Edwina Hughes, Coordinator, Peace Movement Aotearoa

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This joint presentation considered lessons learned by civil society engagement in the Ottawa Process that resulted in the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and the Oslo Process that this year produced the Convention on Cluster Munitions. These unconventional diplomatic endeavors could prove instructive in considering how to move nuclear disarmament forward.

The presentation expanded and updated a list of lessons learned from the Ottawa Process which was put together by Stephen D. Goose and Jody Williams. For NGOs involved in both initiatives, it was crucial to frame the problem as a matter of humanitarian urgency, focus on the human cost of the weapon, and articulate a clear campaign goal in one sentence or less. In securing diplomatic support, civil society set deadlines for action, demanded access to government meetings, challenged conventional diplomacy and old ways of thinking, sought to form partnerships with likeminded governments and international agencies, and encouraged bold political leadership to tackle the weapon. Diversity was crucial to both movements to eradicate landmines and cluster munitions, as was the need for committed workers, a light campaign structure, clear communications and sustained engagement over the long-term.

The presentation provided some preliminary considerations of how civil society could use these experiences banning landmines and cluster munitions to take on nuclear disarmament from a grassroots perspective at all levels - from local, community and national action, through to multilateral diplomatic initiatives.

As with all movements for social change, grassroots initiatives to abolish nuclear weapons over the past 63 years have been many and varied. Such initiatives have included non-violent direct action against nuclear weapons establishments and places where nuclear weapons are deployed, public education and protest, community declarations of nuclear-free zones, campaigns to end government investments in companies involved in the production of nuclear weapons, cultivation of relationships with diplomats and politicians, and a range of lobbying and other work through international fora. All of these are necessary in a coordinated campaign.

The level of activity towards nuclear disarmament, the amount of knowledge and experience that has been accumulated, and the level of public and state support around the world for abolishing nuclear weapons, all provide a head start for an Oslo / Ottawa process for nuclear weapons. In addition, the high level of dissatisfaction with the excruciatingly slow progress towards abolishing nuclear weapons provides incentive for a new approach to get the process moving from a dream to reality.

In the discussion time which followed the presentation, and the subsequent workshop, there was considerable excitement about the possibilities of an Oslo / Ottawa process for nuclear weapons and how we might get that started. The workshop explored how we could apply three of the lessons learned in the Oslo and Ottawa processes to nuclear disarmament: how to communicate the problem, how to articulate a clear goal, and how to speak with one voice.

There was extensive discussion about the role of survivors of nuclear weapons 'testing', production, development and use, because the stories and involvement of survivors of landmines and cluster munitions (and of the relatives of those who did survive) were crucial to the success of both the Oslo and Ottawa processes. The presenters are further developing the lessons learned and the possibilities for nuclear disarmament, and are keen to hear from others interested in doing the same - contact Mary Wareham email wareham@hrw.org and Edwina Hughes pma@xtra.co.nz
