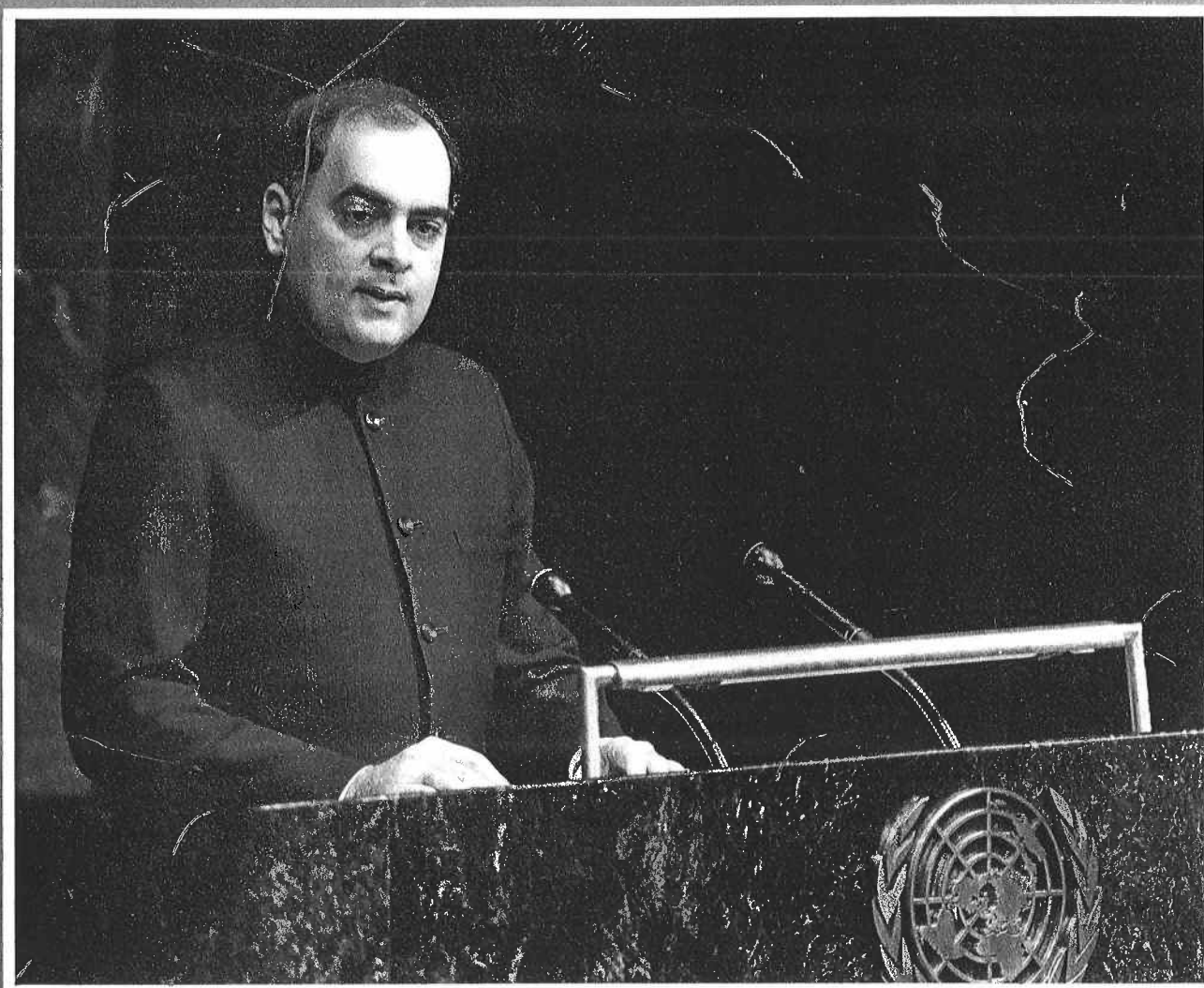


# A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

An Action Plan



**Rajiv Gandhi Addresses Third Special Session  
on Disarmament of U.N. General Assembly.  
June 9, 1988.**

**Text of  
Address to the Third Special Session  
on Disarmament  
of U.N. General Assembly  
by  
Prime Minister of India  
Mr. Rajiv Gandhi.**

**June 9, 1988.**

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Mr. President,

May I begin by extending to you our warmest felicitations on your election as President of this vitally important Special Session of the General Assembly. Our deliberations will benefit greatly from the wealth of your experience and your deep understanding of the issues before us.

We are approaching the close of the twentieth century. It has been the most bloodstained century in history. Fifty eight million perished in two World Wars. Forty million more have died in other conflicts. In the last nine decades, the ravenous machines of war have devoured nearly one hundred million people. The appetite of these monstrous machines grows on what they feed. Nuclear war will not mean the death of a hundred million people. Or even a thousand million. It will mean the extinction of four thousand million: the end of life as we know it on our planet Earth. We come to the United Nations to seek your support. We seek your support to put a stop to this madness.

Humanity is at a crossroads. One road will take us like lemmings to our own suicide. That is the path indicated by doctrines of nuclear deterrence, deriving from traditional concepts of the balance of power. The other road will give us another chance. That is the path signposted by the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, deriving from the imperative values of nonviolence, tolerance and compassion.

In consequence of doctrines of deterrence, international relations have been gravely militarised. Astronomical sums are being invested in ways of dealing with death. Ever new means of destruction continue to be invented. The best of our scientific talent and the bulk of our technological resources are devoted to maintaining and upgrading this awesome ability to obliterate ourselves. A culture of armaments and threats and violence has become pervasive.

For a hundred years after the Congress of Vienna, Europe knew an uncertain peace based on a balance of power. When that balance was tilted—or more accurately, when that balance was perceived to have tilted—Europe was plunged into an orgy of destruction, the like of which had never been known before and which spread to engulf much of the world. The unsettled disputes of the First World War led to the second.

Humankind survived because, by today's standards, the power to destroy, which was then available was a limited power. We now have what we did not then have: the power to ensure the genocide of the human race. Technology has now rendered obsolete the calculations of war and peace on which were constructed the always dubious theories of the balance of power.

It is a dangerous delusion to believe that nuclear weapons have brought us peace. It is true that, in the past four decades, parts of the world have experienced an absence of war. But a mere absence of war is not a durable peace. The balance of nuclear terror rests on the retention and augmentation of nuclear armouries. There can be no ironclad guarantee against the use of weapons of mass destruction. They have been used in the past. They could be used in the future. And, in this nuclear age, the insane logic of mutually assured destruction will ensure that nothing survives, that none lives to tell the tale, that there is no one left to understand what went wrong and why. Peace which rests on the search for a parity of power is a precarious peace. If we can understand what went wrong with such attempts in the past, we may yet be able to escape the catastrophe presaged by doctrines of nuclear deterrence.

There is a further problem with deterrence. The doctrine is based on the assumption that international relations are frozen on a permanently hostile basis. Deterrence needs an enemy, even if one has to be invented. Nuclear deterrence is the ultimate expression of the philosophy of terrorism: holding humanity hostage to the presumed security needs of a few.

There are those who argue that since the consequences of nuclear war are widely known and well understood, nuclear war just cannot happen. Neither experience nor logic can sustain such dangerous complacency. History is full of miscalculations. Perceptions are often totally at variance with reality. A madman's fantasy could unleash the end. An accident could trigger a chain reaction which inexorably leads to doom. Indeed, the advance of technology has so reduced the time for decisions that, once activated, computers programmed for Armageddon, pre-empt human intervention and all hope of survival. There is, therefore, no comfort in the claim of the proponents of nuclear deterrence that everyone can be saved by ensuring that in the event of conflict, everyone will surely die.

The champions of nuclear deterrence argue that nuclear weapons have been invented and therefore, cannot be eliminated. We do not agree. We have an international convention eliminating biological weapons by prohibiting their use in war. We are working on similarly eliminating chemical weapons. There is no reason on principle why nuclear weapons too cannot be so eliminated. All it requires is the affirmation of certain basic moral values and the assertion of the required political will, underpinned by treaties and institutions which insure against nuclear delinquency.

The past few years have seen the emergence of a new danger: the extension of the nuclear arms race into outer space. The ambition of creating impenetrable defences against nuclear weapons has merely escalated the arms race and complicated the process of disarmament. This has happened in spite of the grave doubts expressed by leading scientists.

about its very feasibility. Even the attempt to build a partial shield against nuclear missiles increases the risk of nuclear war. History shows that there is no shield that has not been penetrated by a superior weapon, nor any weapon for which a superior shield has not been found. Societies get caught in a multiple helix of escalation in chasing this chimera, expending vast resources for an illusory security while incurring the risk of certain extinction.

The new weapons being developed for defence against nuclear weapons are part of a much wider qualitative arms race. The development of the so-called "third generation nuclear weapons" has opened up ominous prospects of their being used for selective and discriminate military operations. There is nothing more dangerous than the illusion of limited nuclear war. It desensitizes inhibitions about the use of nuclear weapons. That could lead, in next to no time, to the outbreak of full-fledged nuclear war.

There are no technological solutions to the problems of world security. Security can only come from our asserting effective political control over this self-propelled technological arms race.

We cannot accept the logic that a few nations have the right to pursue their security by threatening the survival of humankind. It is not only those who live by the nuclear sword who, by design or default, shall one day perish by it. All humanity will perish.

Nor is it acceptable that those who possess nuclear weapons are freed of all controls while those without nuclear weapons are policed against their production. History is full of such prejudices paraded as iron laws: that men are superior to women; that the white races are superior to the coloured; that colonialism is a civilising mission; that those who possess nuclear weapons are responsible powers and those who do not are not.

Alas, nuclear weapons are not the only weapons of mass destruction. New knowledge is being generated in the life sciences. Military applications of these developments could rapidly undermine the existing convention against the military use of biological weapons. The ambit of our concern must extend to all means of mass annihilation.

New technologies have also dramatically expanded the scope and intensity of conventional warfare. The physical destruction which can be carried out by full-scale conventional war would be enormous, far exceeding anything known in the past. Even if humankind is spared the agony of a nuclear winter, civilization and civic life as we know it would be irretrievably disrupted. The range, precision and lethality of conventional weapons is being vastly increased. Some of these weapons are moving from being 'smart' to becoming 'intelligent'. Such diabolical technologies generate their own pressures for early use, thus increasing the risk of the outbreak of war. Most of these technologies are at the command of the military blocs. This immensely increases their capacity for interference, intervention and coercive diplomacy.

Those of us who do not belong to the military blocs would much rather stay out of the race. We do not want to accumulate arms. We do not want to augment our capacity to kill.

But the system, like whirlpool, sucks us into its vortex. We are compelled to divert resources from development to defence to respond to the arsenals which are constructed as a sideshow to great power rivalries. As the nature and sophistication of threats to our security increase, we are forced to incur huge expenditure on raising the threshold of our defences.

There is another danger that is even worse. Left to ourselves, we would not want to touch nuclear weapons. But when tactical considerations, in the passing play of great power rivalries, are allowed to take precedence over the imperative of nuclear non-proliferation, with what leeway are we left?

Even the mightiest military powers realise that they cannot continue the present arms race without inviting economic calamity. The continuing arms race has imposed a great burden on national economies and the global economy. It is no longer only the developing countries who are urging disarmament to channel resources to development. Even the richest are beginning to realise that they cannot afford the current levels of the military burden they have imposed upon themselves. A genuine process of disarmament, leading to a substantial reduction in military expenditure, is bound to promote the prosperity of all nations of the globe. Disarmament accompanied by coexistence will open up opportunities for all countries, whatever their socio-economic systems, whatever their levels of development.

The technological revolutions of our century have created unparalleled wealth. They have endowed the fortunate with high levels of mass consumption and widespread social welfare. In fact, there is plenty for everyone, provided distribution is made more equitable. Yet, the possibility of fulfilling the basic needs of nutrition and shelter, education and health remains beyond the reach of vast millions of people in the developing world because resources which could give fulfillment in life are pre-empted for death.

The root causes of global insecurity reach far below the calculus of military parity. They are related to the instability spawned by widespread poverty, squalor, hunger, disease and illiteracy. They are connected to the degradation of the environment. They are enmeshed in the inequity and injustice of the present world order. The effort to promote security for all must be underpinned by the effort to promote opportunity for all the equitable access to achievement. Comprehensive global security must rest on a new, more just, more honourable world order.

When the General Assembly met here last in Special Session to consider questions of disarmament, the outlook was grim. The new cold war had been revived with full force. A new programme of nuclear armament had been set in motion. As a result, during the years that followed, fear and suspicion cast a long shadow over all disarmament negotiations. Humankind was approaching the precipice of nuclear disaster.

Today, there is a new hope for survival and for peace. There is a perceptible movement away from the precipice. Dialogue has been resumed. Trust is in the air.

How has this transformation occurred? We pay tribute to the sagacity of the American and Soviet leaderships. They have seen the folly of nuclear escalation. They have started tracing the outlines of a pattern of disarmament. At the same time, we must recognise the role of countless enlightened men and women all over the world, citizens of the non-nuclear weapon States as much as of the nuclear weapon States. With courage, dedication and perseverance they kept the candle burning in the enveloping darkness. The Six-Nation Initiative voiced the hopes and aspirations of these many millions. At a time when relations between the two major nuclear weapon states dipped to their nadir, the Six Nations—Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania—refocused world attention on the imperative of nuclear disarmament. The appeal of May 1984, issued by Indira Gandhi, Olof Palme and their colleagues, struck a responsive chord. Negotiations stalled for years began inching forward. The process begun in Geneva has led to Reykjavik, Washington and Moscow.

We have all welcomed the ratification of the INF Treaty concluded between General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan. It is an important step in the right direction. Its great value lies in its bold departure from nuclear arms limitation to nuclear disarmament. We hope there will be agreement soon to reduce strategic nuclear arsenals by 50 percent. The process should be carried forward to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Only then will we be able to look back and say that the INF Treaty was a truly historic beginning. India believes it is possible for the human race to survive the second millennium. India believes it is also possible to ensure peace, security and survival into the third millennium and beyond. The way lies through concerted action. We urge the international community to immediately undertake negotiations with a view to adopting a time-bound Action Plan to usher in a world order free of nuclear weapons and rooted in nonviolence.

We have submitted such an Action Plan to this Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly. Our Plan calls upon the international community to negotiate a binding commitment to general and complete disarmament. This commitment must be total. It must be without reservation.

The heart of our Action Plan is the elimination of all nuclear weapons, in three stages, over the next twenty-two years, beginning now. We put this Plan to the United Nations as a programme to be launched at once.

While nuclear disarmament constitutes the centrepiece of each stage of the Plan, this is buttressed by collateral and other measures to further the process of disarmament. We have made proposals for banning other weapons of mass destruction. We have suggested steps for precluding the development of new weapon systems based on emerging technologies. We have addressed ourselves to the task of reducing conventional arms and forces to the minimum levels required for defensive purposes. We have outlined ideas for the conduct of international relations in a world free of nuclear weapons.

The essential features of the Action Plan are:

