SOCIAL SCIENTISTS FOR SANITY AND SURVIVAL
Statement in Support of a Nuclear Ban Treaty Process
On the Irrationality of Nuclear Weapons

Social Scientists for Sanity and Survival heartily endorses the historic Nuclear Ban Treaty as a step towards a world free of the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons. While the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has had partial success in halting the spread of nuclear weapons, the asymmetry is not sustainable. This initiative creates a shift in collective consciousness and norms, increases awareness and holds a vision to organize our work.

As social scientists who study peace, cycles of violence, war, conflict transformation and reconciliation, we know that attempts to merely eliminate the weapons themselves will meet with insurmountable challenges because nuclear weapons are a symptom and a symbol of something deeper. To transcend the nuclear threat we must understand evidence-based relationships between cause and effect and address a range of underlying causes, interests and driving forces, many of which are hidden. These include the motivations to possess nuclear weapons, fear, enmity, the illusion of security they provide, prestige value, underlying conflicts, and the role of structural economic, institutional, and geo-strategic interests in exercising power.

Strong cases have been made that nuclear weapons are illegal according to international law, immoral and inhumane. We add that rationales for possessing nuclear weapons and beliefs in the reliability of deterrence are irrational. The current paradigm is not survivable. It has no endgame or path to resolution.

Albert Einstein said, "There's been a quantum leap technologically in our age, but unless there's another quantum leap in human relations, unless we learn to live in a new way towards one another, there will be a catastrophe."

Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton states that nuclear weapons are "beyond psychology." They alter our relationship to life and death. They impair "our capacity to confront the bomb," to "imagine the real" " distorts our thinking and blunts our feeling about … "issues vital to our survival." We co-exist with the constant threat of annihilation while at the same time believing they somehow make us safer. Here are some insights from psychology.

- **Our thinking, concepts, policies and strategies** regarding conventional weapons cannot be applied to the nuclear realm, orders of magnitude beyond. Ideas of victory, defeat, superiority and deterrence do not hold.

- **Law of Opposites and the Security Dilemma** Absorbed by our own security needs, we overlook how our actions provoke destabilizing insecurity, fear, moral outrage, feelings of inferiority and humiliation in others.

- **Manipulation of fear and exaggerated threats** – Leaders on all sides of conflicts exaggerate threats and dehumanize the "enemy" for many reasons, - to distract from domestic problems, to drive support for defense spending and military action, to gain popularity, and more.

- **The need to reduce fear and its reasons** – Psychologist Ralph K. White said, "The Madness that is carrying the world closer and closer to nuclear war has at its core a psychological explanation: **Each side, though fundamentally afraid, misperceives the nature of the danger it faces. Each side imagines that it faces an inherently, implacably aggressive enemy, when it actually faces an enemy as fearful as itself - an enemy driven mainly by fear, to do the things that lead to war."** (Fearful Warriors.)

  People are more dangerous when afraid, as are we. When afraid, people may regress to primitive, extremist levels and are more likely to act impulsively. Threats, humiliation and backing into a corner can provoke dangerous behavior. Policies, actions and rhetoric that are reassuring and foster communication, empathy and accurate perceptions make us safer. The way to be more secure is to make your enemy more secure.

- **Know the Enemy** - In "Fog of War," a film about Viet Nam, Defense Secretary, Robert MacNamara said that the biggest problem was that we didn't know the enemy. Ralph K. White emphasized the importance of realistic empathy for the enemy, understanding their perspective and how they view us.

- **Reduce Tension**. Actions that increase tensions increase volatility and the potential for violence. Charles Osgood's GRIT strategy, Graduated Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension Reduction recommends unilateral actions to reduce tensions, which can be reciprocated back and forth, ratcheting down tensions without risking vulnerability, thereby creating an arms race in reverse.

- **Zero Sum Thinking** - "A win-or-lose orientation tends to escalate conflicts" according to Mort Deutsch. It impairs communication, reinforces stereotypes, heightens suspicions, encourages misperceptions and miscalculations, generating a "malignant spiral of hostile interactions" that can yield results that nobody wants. Parties employ a "blaming" rather than "problem-solving" strategy, restrict communication, harden positions, and eclipse constructive, mutually beneficial approaches.

- **Denial and Overconfidence** - Leaders, military planners and policy makers are often overconfident about positive outcomes and the ability to win, while denying risks of defeat and potential unintended consequences.

- **Beyond Deterrence** – Deterrence, a theory, may hold up when accompanied by drastic tension reduction (Ralph K. White). If the opponent is acting out of fear, threats increase tension and generate dynamics described by spiral theory. Richard Ned Lebow states that "..deterrence can provoke the very behavior it seeks to prevent." Weaker parties will desire their own "deterrent," believing that possession of the world's greatest means of destruction means that you will be taken seriously. We need to be wise rather than tough.

- **Undeterrability** – Beliefs in deterrence do not account for non-state actors getting nuclear materials. Psychiatrist Vamik Volkan observed that some people would rather die physically than psychologically. People willingly sacrifice their lives for noble and ignoble reasons. Some desire to take others down with them.

- **The underlying conflicts** - Articles 33-38 of the UN Charter governing the peaceful settlement of disputes, states that the parties "shall first seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice."

  Relying on coercion, pressure, sanctions, and punishments, threats, believing "the only thing they understand is force," often backfires. Apparent victories produce humiliation, defiance, instability, and increase popularity of hardliners, harm moderates and motivate asymmetric responses. We miss opportunities to address underlying causes and mutual interests that employ creative solutions and effective nonviolent strategies of conflict transformation that can reduce tensions and improve relationships. Constructive approaches produce better outcomes and "cheaper, deeper security."™

- **Vested financial interests** – "Never dig a hole that you can't fill" is a psychological principle. For the entrenched military industrial complex infrastructure of weapons contractors, let them make money and employ the best scientific brains on life ventures rather than death with conversion to helping solve global climate chaos, or perhaps space travel. Divestment from parties to the Ban Treaty will reduce profitability.

- **War itself** - The UN Charter begins "WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Those of us who have studied the nuclear threat have reached the conclusion that ultimately we need to "replace (rather than abolish) war" as advised by conflict analyst Richard Wendell Fogg, with proven, solution-oriented approaches using nonviolent, higher forms of force. We must strengthen international institutions that can skillfully address conflicts as early as possible.

National Security has become an Oxymoron Today we have either **Universal Security or Universal Insecurity**. Actions taken in the name of "National Security" generate fear, hatred, envy, resentment, a desire to imitate and motivations for asymmetric "warfare of the weak." New threats from non-state actors and cyber warfare change the game and portend nuclear anarchy. Attempts to prevent proliferation may provoke proliferation in the name of deterrence and self-defense, thereby rendering ourselves and the planet more vulnerable. We need a new, and *rational* policy of **Mutually Assured Survival**.
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