

On the Eve of the 10TH Anniversary Of the 1991 Unilateral Declarations
A STATEMENT FROM GREEN CROSS INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL GREEN USA

**PRESENTED AT THE UNIDIR SEMINAR:
“TIME TO CONTROL TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS”**
September 24, 2001

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Introduction

Ten years ago, President George Bush Sr. and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev recognized that the great transformation underway in the world required a visionary response. The United States and the Soviet Union proceeded with unilateral steps to reduce the threat from nuclear weapons since it had become clear to both that the changing world order required "swifter, bolder action" than long-drawn negotiations could afford at the time.

On September 27, 1991, President Bush Sr. addressed the American people saying "the world has changed at a fantastic pace" and made a series of announcements regarding strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. President Gorbachev responded on October 5, 1991 with his commitments on behalf of the then Soviet Union. The importance of these unilateral agreements and actions can not be understated.

These actions forever changed the nuclear landscape. But unfortunately, much remains to be done. On September 11 of this year, the world was sent a violent reminder of the many facets and methods of international aggression, and of the horrors of attacks on urban centers, on civilians. News commentators compared the resulting wreckage and debris to a nuclear winter, leading many of us to wonder, "What if it really had been a nuclear attack?" Nuclear weapons are the single greatest threat to human lives – and to the environment -- we face today.

On the eve of the anniversary of the unilateral agreements between President Bush Sr. and President Gorbachev on nuclear weapons, we were all reminded of the urgent need to reduce the dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction. The threat of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons is very real today, especially from terrorists and violent national leaders, and historic arms control and abolition regimes need to be preserved, strengthened and universalized.

We commend President Bush and the US for supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and assisting Russia in safely destroying these dangerous arms. During this moment, President Bush and the US should reconsider their opposition to the Biological Weapons Convention protocol, and fully participate in this process so we can eliminate this threat.

Global Green USA and Green Cross International also urge the US, Russia, and the global community to work together to put in place binding commitments to advance all aspects of the remarkably important 1991 unilateral agreements we are commemorating today.

We focus in particular on two aspects of these agreements in this statement:

- the de-alerting of strategic nuclear weapons – it is more important than ever that we prevent accidental launch during a time of such high tension;
- reducing the threat of tactical nuclear weapons through proliferation, theft, and accidental use.

There is today widespread fear over the weapons that might be used in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, and over the scope of the new conflict. What will happen if there is war in the volatile region where Russia and other nuclear powers -- and rivals-- like India and Pakistan reside? What can be done now to remind a world that is again poised on the edge of greater violence that nuclear weapons must never be used?

Taking strategic nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert is one important step. Another key measure is to further build on the agreements that have helped reduce the threat of tactical nuclear weapons posed by proliferation, theft and accidental use.

De-alerting

Former President Bush's 1991 announcement committed that all United States strategic bombers would be removed from their alert posture, effective immediately. Nuclear weapons were removed from planes that had for decades been poised to take off in minutes. Bush also announced that all U.S. long-range-missiles slated for elimination under START I would at once be taken off high-alert status. Four hundred and fifty Minuteman-2 missiles were de-alerted, along with the missiles on 10 Poseidon submarines.

President Gorbachev responded by ordering that over 150 Soviet ICBMs in silos and the missiles on six strategic submarines be de-alerted, lowering the alert levels of Soviet bombers, and placing Soviet rail-based nuclear missiles in garrison.

The Cold War is well over, yet Russia and the United States continue to maintain thousands of strategic nuclear weapons on high alert. With most of their Cold War stockpiles intact, Russia and the United States are courting nuclear disaster. They stand ready to destroy each other with a quick launch of their massive nuclear arsenals. Keeping missiles on hair-trigger alert means that leaders have just minutes to assess whether an alleged attack is real or false. Because weapons on high alert are launched in a matter of minutes, there is no time to reassess, and no place to hide.

The threat of a false alarm was serious even before today's international crisis, but the current situation has undoubtedly increased the risk. The difficult situation in Russia has in recent years led to a serious decay in early warning systems. The Russian leadership might easily fear that it has failed to be properly warned of an incoming nuclear attack, and would then move quickly to launch its own weapons.

We have already come too close to accidental nuclear war. There have been false alarms on both sides that have brought us to the brink. How can we prevent such false alarms and the threat of untold human and environmental losses?

Perhaps the current President Bush has the answer. During his campaign last year, George W. Bush said the "United States should remove as many weapons as possible from high-alert, hair-trigger status -- another unnecessary vestige of Cold War confrontation."

In the spirit of his father's foresight and courage, President Bush can now stake out his own claim to history. In this time of escalating rhetoric, the U.S. can take the initiative to relax its nuclear posture. Instead of keeping 2,000 nuclear weapons ready for an immediate launch--and projecting a constant threat to the sudden decimation of Russia's arsenal--the U.S. can and should de-alert its forces to motivate Russia to do the same.

This would also send a signal to other nuclear powers that in this volatile time, the U.S. is stepping back from the use of nuclear weapons. The goal, of course, is to get all U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons off high alert, but this objective could be achieved in stages--just as significant reductions in nuclear weapons is a step toward their eventual elimination (a goal already agreed to by the U.S., Russia and other nuclear powers in the NPT).

Tactical Nuclear Weapons

If we are to create a nuclear-free, sustainable and more stable world, we must also turn our attention to the threat posed by tactical nuclear weapons. As terrorists plot their next move, the world's first concern is about the release of biological or chemical weapons on civilian populations. But there is also a real danger that terrorists will obtain and detonate a tactical nuclear weapon.

The characteristics of many tactical nuclear weapons make them more susceptible to theft and unauthorized use. It is therefore key to eliminating the tools of future terror that we reduce and eliminate tactical nuclear weapons.

There are many steps that should be taken to reduce this threat. As START III negotiations seem stalled, the US should initiate a dialogue with Russia on making TNW agreements binding, possibly in separate negotiations from the START process. This could begin with reaffirming the Gorbachev and Bush Sr. 1991 declarations through formal statements from both President Bush and President Putin.

We also need to build the basis for verification of the existing TNW unilateral agreements. Basic data and information on tactical nuclear weapons should be exchanged. The creation of a verification regime should be explored.

Further, the United States should be encouraged to remove all remaining tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. Such a move would help dispel Russian concerns about NATO, and could help to revive the spirit of the parallel 1991 initiatives.

Finally, deeper reductions in tactical nuclear weapons must be considered. We must act swiftly, and reduce the momentum of US and Russian voices calling for the increase in tactical nuclear weapons and their use in battle. If the two leading nuclear powers appear to consider tactical nuclear weapons "usable" and acceptable in battle, others will follow. This we can not allow.

Conclusion

Nuclear weapons represent the greatest environmental danger our world knows and most destructive potential tool of terror we face. Therefore, the threat of nuclear weapons must be reduced and eliminated.

Global Green USA and Green Cross International encourage President Bush to take bold and important steps, such as further removing strategic nuclear weapons from high alert and implementing additional measures to reduce the threat of tactical nuclear weapons, to signal his commitment to prevent either accidental or terrorist nuclear attacks. It will also strengthen the important partnership with Russia in eliminating these threats. It would also be fitting if the son of the President who took the first steps in this direction would now do his part to prevent a nuclear disaster.

We congratulate UNIDIR and the other original partners in organizing this meeting despite the challenges presented by recent events. We are proud and honored to be a co-host of "Time to Control Tactical Nuclear Weapons." Let this seminar mark the next step in our work together in achieving this fundamental goal.

The Green Cross Legacy Program

Under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, Green Cross International created the Legacy Program specifically to analyze and mitigate the environmental consequences of the Cold War, with an emphasis on the toxic and dangerous stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction amassed during a half-century of animosity. Working with government, individuals and other NGO's, Green Cross has been a key leader in the United States and Russia in eliminating the threat of chemical weapons. The Green Cross Legacy Program is helping reduce the threat of nuclear weapons through a number of growing initiatives in the US and Russia.

Green Cross International and Global Green USA

Green Cross International (GCI) was founded by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993, as prompted by the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and Agenda 21. GCI is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and has 26 national organizations.

Global Green USA is headquartered in Los Angeles with offices in Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Georgia. Global Green USA's board and advisors include many key US voices and leaders involved in disarmament and nonproliferation policies including former Senator Gary Hart (the co-chair of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century), former Congressman Lee Hamilton, Congressman Chris Shays, and Ambassador Wyche Fowler.

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