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**COMMENTS BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK  
TO THE PANEL ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS  
AT THE SUMMIT OF NOBEL PEACE LAUREATES  
MÉRIDA, YUCATÁN, MEXICO  
20 SEPTEMBER 2019**

74 years after Hiroshima, the world's nuclear weapons arsenals continue to pose an existential threat to mankind.

After so many decades of efforts to limit and eliminate nuclear weapons, it should be clear by now that none of the nuclear weapons states have the slightest intention of dispensing with their own nuclear weapons capability.

There is, indeed, general agreement about the need to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons - and nuclear weapons states may from time to time be willing to enter into agreements regarding the rationalisation of their nuclear weapons arsenals - but there is no indication that they are prepared to do much more than give lip service to the elimination of this fundamental threat to human existence.

Only three states have ever rid themselves of a nuclear weapons capability. Kazakhstan and Ukraine agreed to divest themselves of the nuclear weapons that they had inherited from the old Soviet Union, and in 1989 South Africa decided to dismantle its nuclear weapons capability. We did so because possession of nuclear weapons no longer made any sense. We embarked on our nuclear weapons programme in 1975 because of the growing threat of a super-power in our region - and because we did not belong to an alliance that would protect us.

We discovered that the best means of promoting our security was not to have our own weapons of mass destruction - but to reach agreement on the establishment of a non-racial constitutional democracy that would assure the rights and freedoms of all our peoples. By so doing, we also removed the source of conflict with our own people and with our neighboring states in Southern Africa.

Countries will be inclined to produce nuclear weapons:

- If they have the ability to do so;
- If they perceive that they are threatened by a nuclear weapons state or by a state with overwhelming conventional weapons superiority; and
- If they do not belong to an international alliance that provides them with credible protection against such threats.

The world is now moving away from the unipolar military supremacy of the United States. The geostrategic tectonic plates are shifting from East Asia, to the Middle East, to Eastern Europe and to the Baltic.



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My fear is that states with the ability to produce nuclear weapons will do so as quickly as they can if they:

- perceive themselves to be threatened by existing nuclear weapons states - or by states with overwhelming conventional weapons supremacy; and
- no longer have confidence in the alliances that have protected them thus far.

This would be an enormous setback for our vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

The solution to the possibility of further escalation of nuclear weapons lies in the credible removal of the perceived threat posed by nuclear weapons states and states with overwhelming conventional military power. It also lies in the resolution of the underlying sources of injustice and inequity in international relations - just as it did in the case of South Africa 30 years ago.

I accordingly agree with President Mikhail Gorbachev's proposal that this Summit should adopt a statement calling upon all leaders of nuclear-weapons powers to reaffirm - without delay - the proposition that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. We should remind the leaders of nuclear weapons states that they should "reaffirm the inadmissibility of nuclear war and return to the negotiating table to agree on reducing and eliminating the nuclear arsenals."

The future of humanity may depend upon it.