

## **Messenger of Peace Michael Douglas remarks to the Academic Symposium during the NPT Review Conference**

**New York, 28 April 2015**

Mr. Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

I want to thank the Government of the Netherlands, High Representative Angela Kane and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Belfer Center of Harvard University, and the James Martin Center for organizing this event.

It is my privilege to have this opportunity to recognize the important role of scholars in addressing an issue that has plagued the international community for far too long.

Seventy years ago, atomic bombs decimated the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Just two blasts caused unthinkable human suffering and environmental devastation. And the shadow of these events fell over the whole world.

Growing up during the Cold War, here in New York City, I was routinely reminded of the threat of nuclear weapons. Fallout shelters and ‘duck and cover’ drills were part of our daily lives.

Of course, the world’s nuclear arsenal has been reduced by over half since its Cold War peak. And the START and New START are signals that cooperation on reducing nuclear stockpiles is possible.

But the threat posed by nuclear weapons is no less important today than it was during my childhood. We may now have fewer nuclear weapons, but these weapons and their delivery systems are more powerful and more sophisticated than ever before.

One of the great ironies of this is that the cost of developing and maintaining nuclear weapons is surpassed only by the human and environmental costs of using them. And although it may be expensive to destroy them, the price we would pay if they fell into the wrong hands or detonated accidentally would be far greater.

But with tensions surfacing and resurfacing around the world, nuclear weapons have once again become a political tool. This technology that affects us and our environment so profoundly is wielded as an instrument of power.

And that is why the work of academics and scholars is so crucial. You are not bound by the same political constraints as the delegates at this year’s NPT Review Conference.

Your research allows us to consider many possibilities for moving beyond entrenched military doctrines or seemingly fixed political positions. Your scholarship inspires debate. Your teaching fosters understanding. And with understanding, we can challenge the fears that allow nuclear weapons to be used to intimidate, coerce and control. And so, in a very real sense, your work can and will bring us closer to a world free of nuclear weapons.

I hope that your discussions today are fruitful. I have no doubt that the impact of what happens here today will be felt far beyond the walls of this room, and well into the future.

Thank you.