

# Peace Education: Nobel Voices for Disarmament: 1901-2001

by Michael Cassandra

Disarmament, once a tall and powerful word in the popular mind that evoked grand visions of international peace and accord, now summons regrettably little inspiration and enthusiasm. Those who work on disarmament issues are familiar with the quizzical look on faces when the word is mentioned. On the advice of a sage ambassador, I tell my interlocutors that I work with weapons. That always gets their attention.

*Si vis pacem, para bellum*: If you seek peace, prepare for war.<sup>1</sup> On a grand scale, the phrase neatly sums up the doctrine of nuclear deterrence that the great powers employed throughout the Cold War. At its height, this strategy imperiled the entire planet for nearly half of the last century and led to an estimated 70,000 nuclear weapons being poised for release, either willfully or accidentally. This may come as a surprise to many, but this doctrine still defines the nuclear situation today, where the two nations that possess the greatest number of the still extant, approximately 17,000, nuclear weapons in 2013, continue to maintain these weapons *on high alert status*. All this, despite the Cold War's end more than 20 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

A primordial responsibility of a national government is to defend and preserve its people and their way of life. Equally, the people of a nation have a primordial responsibility to know how its government is defending the nation. It is a deep lesson in civic responsibility to encounter people who love their country but disagree with some of their national government's decisions on how to carry out national defense. It is inspirational that some have been able, with grit and determination, to effect change in national policy. Some are driven by qualms of conscience; some are gifted with sharp-eyed diplomacy and political acumen; some have immense knowledge of weapons and the practice and policy of warfare. They all use their voices—some loud, some soft—to bring about change. It was with this idea of "amplifying voices" that engendered the education project, [\*Nobel Voices for Disarmament: 1901-2001\*](#).

The project started several years ago, when the CD's producer, Canadian audio professional David Tarnow, visited Smithsonian's [Lemelson Center for Invention & Innovation](#) and saw photographic portraits of Nobel Prize winning innovators. He soon approached [Smithsonian Folkways](#), whose mission entails increasing understanding among peoples through the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound, about giving voices to those portraits of innovators. He also spoke to the [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs](#), which had

recently revived its disarmament education program and was in search of promoting pedagogic material to inspire youth to learn more about disarmament.

With that purpose in mind, two mighty institutions decided to combine their efforts to give voice to Nobel Peace Prize awardees of the past and the present. [Nobel Voices for Disarmament: 1901-2001](#) brings the listener live and recorded voices of those who have made great strides forward in disarmament, either alone or with organizations they founded or helped to found. These figures speak of their motivations, failures, achievements, and what remains to be done around issues of disarmament. Here is a taste of those voices.

In the 1980s, when intrigue and suspicion permeated the world's political atmosphere, especially between the United States and the Soviet Union, [Bernard Lown and Yevgeny Chazov](#), two well-established and highly placed cardiologists from opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, founded an international organization, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. The purpose was to press their case that any use of nuclear weapons would be an overall catastrophe for the health and welfare of humankind, as there could never be any medical recourse adequate enough to caring for all of those in need after a nuclear exchange.

In the 1990s, [Jody Williams](#) decided not to tackle the unimaginable power of nuclear weapons, but rather the continuing devastation that the smallest weapons, anti-personnel landmines, were wreaking in lands that had suffered civil disruption and war, long after war was over. Ms. Williams took her grassroots savvy to the international level, co-founding the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. The campaign doggedly pursued a total ban, much to the dismay of the major military powers. It eventually convinced a majority of nations to rid from their arsenals these small but deadly indiscriminate weapons that were destroying or maiming thousands of innocent lives.

[Joseph Rotblat](#), who left Poland just prior to the Nazi invasion of 1939, embraced his responsibility as a nuclear physicist and joined the Manhattan Project that was developing the atomic bomb during World War II. When it was discovered that Germany was not pursuing atomic bomb development, Mr. Rotblat became the only high-level scientist to leave the Manhattan Project. He went on to co-found Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which gave scientists an opportunity to engage each other in discussions about their own responsibility for the work they did in laboratories.

The CD presents other voices as well, from historical recording archives to the commentaries of modern day disarmers. These voices include the writings of [Henri Dunant](#), the founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Lord [Philip Noel-Baker](#), a disarmament activist into his 90s, who helped found the League of Nations; and [Jane Addams](#), who founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915.

“The release of atom power has changed everything except our way of thinking,” said Albert Einstein. To stimulate, enrich, and perhaps even change minds remains at the root disarmament education. As the Secretary General of the United Nations stated in a 2002 report,<sup>3</sup> produced by a distinguished group of experts on disarmament education, “it is important to understand how the excessive manufacture, trade, procurement and stockpiling of weapons can exacerbate war and

make it more lethal and dangerous, or how this affects health, destroys the environment or hinders development. Indeed, the more that is known about conflict the better.”

To assist educators and students, Smithsonian Folkways developed [a rich curriculum](#) to enhance knowledge and critical thinking skills. It introduces the student to concepts such as thinking globally and acting locally for peace and tolerance, the purpose of the United Nations, the impact of activists and organizations in bringing about change, and the relationship between war and socioeconomic justice.

The voices heard on [Nobel Voices for Disarmament: 1901-2001](#) can help young people recast the meaning of the word "disarmament" in the positive light of peace and peacemaking. These voices teach us that though conflict and war appear to be inevitable parts of our human condition, international agreements can be achieved, and even wars can be humanized. By representing figures of social and political activism, as well as formal diplomacy and negotiation, this release demonstrates that small steps towards peace can be gained through diverse means. The goal of peace may remain lofty, but with each generation, its potential becomes renewed. As stated in the preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): “Since wars begin in the mind of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Replace “men” with “young men and women” and you have the driving force for disarmament education today.

*Michael Cassandra is the former chief of the Information and Outreach Branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.*

<sup>1</sup> First penned in the fourth century by Roman war writer, Vegetius, the phrase is typically used to convey the strategy of peace through strong-arm deterrence. If adversaries perceive your society to be strong and weaponized, they are less likely to engage you in conflict.

<sup>2</sup> Russia: Approximately 1,499 deployed strategic warheads [1]. The Federation of American Scientists estimates Russia has another 1,022 nondeployed strategic warheads and approximately 2,000 tactical nuclear warheads. Additional thousands are awaiting dismantlement.

United States: Approximately 5,113 nuclear warheads [2], including tactical, strategic, and nondeployed weapons. According to the latest official New START declaration, the United States deploys 1,722 strategic nuclear warheads on 806 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers. The Federation of American Scientists estimates that the United States' nondeployed strategic arsenal is approximately 2,800 warheads and the U.S. tactical nuclear arsenal numbers 500 warheads. Additional warheads are retired and await dismantlement.

Source: Arms Control Association website [www.armscontrol.org](http://www.armscontrol.org) Arms Control Association, Federation of American Scientists (Nuclear Information Project), International Panel on Fissile Materials, U.S. Department of Defense, and U.S. Department of State.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education: Report of the Secretary General. 2002. Accessed June 2013 at: [www.un.org/](http://www.un.org/)