

**“Canadian Pugwash, Existential Threats to Humanity,  
and the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto”**

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**Sandra Ionno Butcher  
Executive Director  
Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs**

On 9 July 2005 I spoke to Joseph Rotblat for the last time. It was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, that famous message from some of the world’s leading scientists from both East and West which called out from the depths of the Cold War for people to wake up to the dangers of the nuclear age. That Manifesto would lead creative thinkers to Cyrus Eaton’s doorstep here in Pugwash, Nova Scotia. That Manifesto gave birth to the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, the organization with which Rotblat later shared the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize.

Rotblat’s prize hangs here in Thinkers Lodge, as Jo Rotblat intended, so that all who come to this place will gain inspiration from those early pioneers of the nuclear age. That medal is a reminder to us all of the work yet to be done to fulfil the mission set forward when Einstein added his signature to the Manifesto in what would be the final public act of his life. That medal is a reminder that great accomplishments can come when we work together in creative ways. The work set in motion with that signature and those of the other brave scientists who added their good names to the Manifesto continues today in various forms in some of the world’s leading hotspots, still drawing together the world’s leading thinkers around “the Pugwash table” – in a format and a process now recognized worldwide as a symbol of dialogue with purpose, in the hope that we might yet eliminate one of the greatest threats to humanity.

The Manifesto’s core challenges, now 60 years old this week, are very much on my mind as we sum up these days of discussion here at this Canadian Pugwash meeting: We have to learn to think in a new way. We have to remember our humanity and forget the rest. We have to gather together to discuss our different perspectives. We have to rid the world of nuclear weapons and ultimately of war itself.

The Manifesto was an appeal during some of the most dangerous days of the Cold War, urging us to stop the madness, urging us to avoid the arms race that did in fact come, reminding us that in a nuclear age we can never ensure that war will not spiral out and lead to profound and devastating results for the entire planet.

These messages have been renewed in recent years as states have started to address the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons once again. More advanced technology is available allowing us to better assess what might happen if multiple nuclear bombs were to explode, and drawing attention to the still hair raising possible impact of the accidental or intentional use of nuclear weapons.

Steve Miller, the current chair of the Pugwash Executive Committee once said the most profound message of the Manifesto is “the need for eternal vigilance in addressing the dangers associated with nuclear weapons”<sup>1</sup>. This remains true as we take stock on this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Manifesto.

Today, states are modernizing weapons. More is being learned about near misses and accidents that took us to the brink of disaster. Tensions are building among the nuclear superpowers. Fears continue that nuclear weapons may further spread. The disarmament and non-proliferation regime is creaking at its seams due to inaction in corridors of power, and as meeting after meeting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty review process yields lots of talk but disappointingly little progress. There are still 15,700 nuclear weapons in the world. 14,700 of those belong to two countries – Russia and the USA.<sup>2</sup> It’s not a time for complacency.

As Steve wrote, “at some elemental level [The Manifesto] captures an essential truth: nuclear weapons do pose an unprecedented challenge to mankind and require eternal vigilance if disaster beyond imagining is to be averted. The real focus should be not on the subsequent [at the time fifty and now 60 years] safely (if dangerously) traversed, but on the eternity to come in which the nuclear affairs of the planet must be managed without misstep by imperfect and occasionally irrational human beings in a world plagued by conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Miller, in the Pugwash publication “The Manifesto 50 years” from a Plenary Lecture at the 55th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs “60 Years After Hiroshima and Nagasaki” 22-27 July 2005, Hiroshima, Japan

<sup>2</sup> <http://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>

and violence. As Bertrand Russell wrote with characteristic vividness in his memorable last essay, nuclear peace must hold ‘throughout future ages, until the sun grows cold.’”<sup>3</sup>

The last time Ruth Adams spoke from the Thinkers’ Lodge veranda she said that at its time the Manifesto was “like finding a crack in the Iron Curtain. Especially to me, and to many of those in my generation in that setting, it gave meaning and set a principled direction that we could follow with enthusiasm.”<sup>4</sup> Though parts of the Manifesto today are outdated and thankfully its worst fears have not yet been realized, we still must take heed of its message. We are far from out of the woods. It still provides a principled direction to follow. We can still draw from the courage and audacity of the Manifesto.

In July 1955, as the world was still digesting the Manifesto’s message, a NY Times editorial said, “The guilt, the doubt, and the misgivings exist. The sinister clouds that blossomed over Hiroshima and Nagasaki have not been wholly dissipated. Their psychological fallout continues, distressing the minds of men. What can cure this sickness of our generation? The answer that Lord Russell and his associates have given can be effective only as it persuades. More than this, it can be effective only as governments have reason to trust one another.”<sup>5</sup>

We are meeting now as the Iran nuclear negotiations are reaching their conclusion. The negotiations have proved what we in Pugwash learned long ago (and we in fact contributed in our limited way to this very process) – that dialogue, even when difficult, can pave the way for increased understanding and can often lead to breakthroughs that none previously imagined. Talks, while difficult, yield outcomes not possible via shorter term military means. It’s not necessary to trust the person across the table to meet. Sometimes talks create preconditions for trust – through building common language, a frame of reference, opportunities to see into each other’s eyes.

Now I come via this roundabout path to the topic I was asked to speak about: Canadian Pugwash and existential threats to humanity. Canadian Pugwash and all national groups play a proud and important role in the fulfilment of the mission laid out in the Manifesto.

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Miller, (in the Pugwash publication “The Manifesto 50 years” from a Plenary Lecture at the 55th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs “60 Years After Hiroshima and Nagasaki” 22-27 July 2005, Hiroshima, Japan)

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Adams, “Reflections 1957-2003,” Address in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, July 20, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> NYT editorial, 11 July 1955

National Pugwash groups have different forms and modes of operation. Their strength waxes and wanes for all those tiring and challenging reasons that make engaging as civil society sometimes difficult – funding, frustration, lack of new people, changing political environments, apathetic governments, diverted public attention. I could go on, but you know it all too well. In addition, there can be tensions between competing visions for priorities within groups, between groups and with the central organization.

I submit that such tensions are a sign we are doing our job. Pugwash was never meant to be a “feel good” exercise. If we are fulfilling our mission every single table, every single meeting will by design have opposing perspectives. Imagine the differences between the Soviets, Americans, Chinese, Japanese and others who sat at that first table here in Pugwash, Nova Scotia in 1957. They did not come expecting to find an easy discussion. They came despite the differences. They came because of the differences. They came to see what is possible. They came understanding that the goals of nuclear disarmament and the abolition of war were not likely to be fast or comfortable. They came precisely because they knew the stakes were high and good people everywhere had to do something.

Mark Oliphant wrote of the dilemma he faced upon receiving Russel’s invitation: “If I accept...I am associated with...known communists...Yet, can I say no and still feel decent? Would I not be a coward? We are in a bad spot morally, ethically, nationally.”<sup>6</sup>

Every single Pugwash meeting seeks to move a step closer to some sort of resolution of issues the founders warned us about so clearly: the need for disarmament, the need to avoid war, the responsibility of scientists and policy makers to take steps to avert the worst case outcomes. The interrelatedness between understanding ‘the other’, the imperative of dialogue, the requirement that especially in difficult times people of goodwill and expertise have a responsibility to seek solutions.

Pugwash today, with the help of its national groups and contacts, its Council members, policy makers who value the Pugwash process, through engagement with sister NGOs and civil society organizations worldwide, and also through its involvement with up and coming young experts, continues to seek to fulfil those goals.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Oliphant to H.R. Marston, 11 September 1956.

In that last conversation with Jo Rotblat I renewed my promise to continue to work on the history of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. I am glad now that I had not completed the Pugwash history when I last spoke to him, disappointing as it was to have my mentor believe our project had failed. I meant it when I said I am a stubborn person, and I will ensure it is eventually completed one way or another.

But had I written the Pugwash history then, without having had the experience I have gained in recent years working for the international organization I would not have understood what I was writing about. I would never have known the personal challenge of sitting across a table from people my government does not want Americans to talk with, as they did at that first and later meetings. I would not have seen exactly how hard it is sometimes to remove the suspicions and targeted accusations that arise when one meets with and listens to 'the other' and the courage it takes to overcome that label as a modern day 'fellow traveller' when talking to certain groups. (Let's not forget Pugwash was once investigated by a Congressional committee for possible un-American activities.)

I would not have seen how one private conversation between certain parties in a corner of a room during a break might make an entire meeting worthwhile, or how one toast over a dinner might be more important than hours of plenaries and roundtable discussions. I would not have seen people leave a meeting thinking nothing was accomplished only to find out later that indeed something quite remarkable had happened once those people went back to their home countries. I would not have seen how showing respect for another's culture can sometimes (often) be more important than a fully footnoted research report. I would not have seen that sometimes those meetings with the least paperwork, least structure and the vaguest of agenda topics can be the most important. I would not have appreciated just how critical tenacity can be and that it is in fact demanded by the tasks at hand. I would not have understood what Herb York once told me, that the most important thing Pugwash does is to enable people to meet each other at times when there are no other good places to do that.<sup>7</sup>

Jo Rotblat said in a message 10 years ago, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Manifesto, "This is no way to run the world. Imagine a world governed forever by mutual fear. Surely, that is

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<sup>7</sup> Herb York, interview with Sandra Ionno Butcher, in La Jolla, California, 28 April 1998.

not a world that any of us would want to live in, yet it is the way the politicians are taking us.”<sup>8</sup>

So, what then?

How can we stop the politicians from continuing down this path?

Some believe that we must move immediately to ban nuclear weapons, whether or not the states with nuclear weapons agree or engage with the process. Some believe a series of arms control measures are more likely to create conditions for and steps toward deeper and eventually multilateral negotiations toward disarmament. Some think it’s important to start with an ‘agreement to renounce nuclear weapons’, as called for in the Manifesto. There are many, many possible ways forward – we have after all been rehearsing these concepts for several decades now. Sadly people pursuing those various paths don’t always consider multiple routes to be helpful and the differences among the disarmament seekers on these issues has reached perhaps unprecedented levels of tension. But we should embrace this dynamic moment. There is no one “right” answer. As the Norwegian “gang of five” said – “The road is made by walking it”.<sup>9</sup>

Standing here as we prepare to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the use of atomic weapons it is fitting that I close with words of two leading Japanese Pugwashites, Tomonaga and Yukawa, who were present at that first meeting here – right here. Right here.

They wrote in 1975:

“Thirty [now 70] years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we live at a dangerous time when the menace of nuclear weapons seems to grow worse and worse, a time in which it will be decided whether nuclear weapons will continue to evolve and proliferate or whether the necessarily drastic steps will finally be taken to create every possible assurance for humanity that these terrible weapons will never be used...A nuclear war would bring catastrophic suffering and destruction, it would make impossible the achievement of a better world, and

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<sup>8</sup> (50th anniversary of the manifesto, welcome message to the 55th Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Hiroshima)

<sup>9</sup> Four former Prime Ministers of Norway, Odvar Nordli, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Kåre Willoch and Kjell Magne Bondevik and former Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, 4 June 2009 in a letter in the Aftenposten.

it would produce far worse human conditions than has ever been known in modern times. For these reasons it is our conviction that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is the gravest of all possible crimes against mankind. The gravity of the nuclear peril is such that we must work to achieve nuclear disarmament at the earliest possible time.”<sup>10</sup>

This is what Canadian Pugwash and all Pugwashites worldwide recognize. This is an existential threat. And the only weapon to defeat this danger is dialogue.

We all have to work together, across the lines that divide us – indeed because those lines divide us.

Thank you all for your time. And truly, thank you all for the work that you do. Let’s keep walking on the road some very great and prescient people set us upon right here from this very doorstep.

We are still making history, messy as that is.

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<sup>10</sup> (Sin-Itiro Tomonaga, Hideki Yukawa, September 1975, 20th anniversary of the Manifesto, Dec 1975, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists)