



by Michael Douglas

A UN Messenger for Peace Strives to
End the Nuclear Threat

In 1945

the United Nations was founded with one major goal in mind, and I quote, “to save succeeding

generations from the scourge of war.” The founders noted that twice in the 20th Century major wars had brought “untold sorrow to mankind.” Since its founding, 191 nations have joined the UN.

We have no other place where all nations can work together for peace, a place where we can use verbal conflict rather than armed conflict to solve problems. And often, the UN, with US support, has provided armed force to help ensure the peace.

The entire planet now faces global challenges including ensuring bio-diversity and ending the destruction of thousands of species; reversing the depletion of fishing stocks; controlling ocean dumping; preventing ozone depletion; halting global warming; controlling and eliminating terrorism and weapons of mass destruction; fighting pandemic diseases; ending the tragedy of crushing poverty and lack of clean drinking water; and addressing crises arising from failed States. No nation or even a small group of nations can succeed in addressing these issues alone.

The United Nations is based on political insights that have led to successful governance principles and enhanced the wealth of nations. These values include market freedoms, religious liberty, an independent judiciary, government transparency and accountability, democracy, and a high level of respect for civil liberties and human rights. They have evolved into nearly universal goals and norms. The countries that have adhered to these principles are the most secure and healthy.

The United Nations is guided by such countries, and simultaneously provides the only viable forum for the expression of the aspirations of the poor and the weak.



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The establishment of international norms of conduct is where idealism informs realism. We are called to nothing less than moral leadership. When moral leadership is coupled with power, it galvanizes the world. Moral leadership requires living up to one's promises and commitments.

Fulfilling our promises in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, now with 189 member States, must be a primary aim. This Treaty, essential to our security, will be reviewed formally in 2005 at the UN. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) performs a vital role under the Treaty — it's the world's nuclear inspectorate to check that countries are not pursuing nuclear weapons. I've had the chance to visit the UN and IAEA at their headquarters in Vienna, Austria, and know how tough the job can be. We need to back the IAEA and make sure it stays strong in our fight against nuclear weapons.

At the 2000 Review of the Treaty, the US along with all other parties to the Treaty made a pledge. Let

me remind you of what was promised, and I quote: “an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapons States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals... leading to nuclear disarmament...”

There are tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in the world, over 90% are possessed by Russia and the US. Most are many times more devastating than those used on Hiroshima.

The arsenals of Russia and the US are armed, targeted and poised, waiting for three short computer signals to fire. These hair trigger devices represent the devastation of approximately 100,000 Hiroshimas and pose a horrific threat to life. The use of a nuclear weapon could take place by accident or design by States, or even terrorists. These weapons pose an unacceptable risk to the planet.

We must demonstrate our unambiguous commitment to fulfill our promises. Otherwise, the prospect of more nuclear weapons States, and the construction of new nuclear weapons, will only increase human peril. The world needs a more effective non-proliferation and disarmament regime and is looking to us for leadership.

Michael Douglas is an award-winning film and television actor and producer who has demonstrated a strong commitment to disarmament, including nuclear non-proliferation and stemming the tide of small arms and light weapons. He was appointed a UN Messenger of Peace in 1998. This essay is based on a keynote address delivered at the US Congress, October 2003, for a presentation on “The Limits of Unilateralism”.

United Nations Messengers of Peace are individuals who possess widely recognized talents in the fields of arts, literature, music and sports and who have agreed to help focus worldwide attention on the work of the United Nations.

Dr. Jane Goodall is best known for her pioneering work with chimpanzees in Tanzania. In recognition of her contribution to the advancement of research, education and advocacy on environmental issues, the UN Secretary-General appointed her a member of an advisory panel to assist in promoting the goals of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Dr. Goodall has championed the promotion of peace worldwide in the context of the International Day of Peace.



Opera singer Luciano Pavarotti is strongly committed to alleviating the suffering of children affected by war. For more than a decade, he has performed at and organized concerts to benefit children stricken by war in three continents. In recent years, proceeds of the Pavarotti and Friends annual concerts have been donated to education and health projects for Afghan refugee children in Pakistan, Angolan refugees in Zambia and Iraqi refugees.



Three-time World Heavyweight Champion boxer Muhammad Ali is devoted to the pursuit of peace. He brings people from all races together by preaching “healing” to everyone irrespective of race, religion or age. Over the years Mr. Ali has been a relentless advocate for people in need and a significant humanitarian actor in the developing world, supporting relief and development initiatives and hand-delivering food and medical supplies to hospitals, street children and orphanages in Africa and Asia.

