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Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

**Statement of the Pugwash Council
Monday, 12 November 2001, London, UK**

The Dangers of Nuclear Terrorism

The horrific nature of the September 11 attacks has demonstrated the ability of international terrorist networks to carry out well-planned and complex operations that can kill thousands of innocent civilians. The potential for biological, chemical, and/or nuclear terrorism has greatly increased.

While there has long been concern about nuclear material being acquired by non-state groups, reports in the past few days indicate that nuclear weapons may now, or soon will be, available to terrorist groups. The challenges facing the international community from terrorism have been greatly compounded by the world's failure to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.

Most immediately, the members of the United Nations must adopt and effectively implement the proposed international conventions on international terrorism and on nuclear terrorism.

More generally, the large quantities of highly-enriched uranium (HEU) that are poorly controlled and otherwise unaccounted for in the former Soviet Union and dozens of other countries demand immediate attention and action by the world community.

HEU poses the danger that it is far easier to manufacture into a nuclear weapon than is plutonium, so much so that even sub-national terrorist groups could accomplish the challenge. European and Asian governments especially need to join the United States in providing aid to the Russian government in controlling and destroying this fissile material (enough to build 20,000 nuclear bombs) through greatly accelerated funding and commitment to such programs as the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (Nunn-Lugar). In addition, the international convention on the physical protection of nuclear materials must be strengthened and expanded, and greater efforts made to safeguard fissile materials in civilian use.

HEU can, however, be readily diluted with natural uranium to a low-enriched level where it has high commercial value as a proliferation-proof fuel for civil nuclear reactors. Here again, an important opportunity exists for Europe and Japan to work with the United States in purchasing such fuel from Russia and greatly reducing available supplies of weapons-grade uranium.

Much work will be needed on a broad range of fronts, from recognizing and addressing the root causes that facilitate the growth of terrorist networks, to bringing to justice those who commit mass murder and crimes against humanity.

In order to safeguard global peace and security, it is essential that national governments and the world community recognize that the twin dangers of international terrorism and nuclear proliferation pose entirely new threats that demand immediate and sustained attention.

The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, co-recipient of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize with its Founder and then President, Sir Joseph Rotblat, was founded in 1957 with the aim of reducing and abolishing nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. In the coming weeks, Pugwash will publish Issue Briefs with more in-depth analysis of ways of protecting against nuclear and biological terrorism.