

## In the spotlight

### Campaigning for the elimination of nuclear weapons

Annika Thunborg, Head of Public Information at the CTBTO,  
talks to Michael Douglas, the Academy Award-winning actor and UN Messenger of Peace



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: STEPHEN SMITH (AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER), WILLIAM PERRY (FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE), URSULA PLASSNIK (FORMER AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER), MICHAEL DOUGLAS (UN MESSENGER OF PEACE), AND BRUNO STAGNO UGARTE (COSTA RICAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS) AT THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF THE CTBT'S ENTRY INTO FORCE, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 2008.

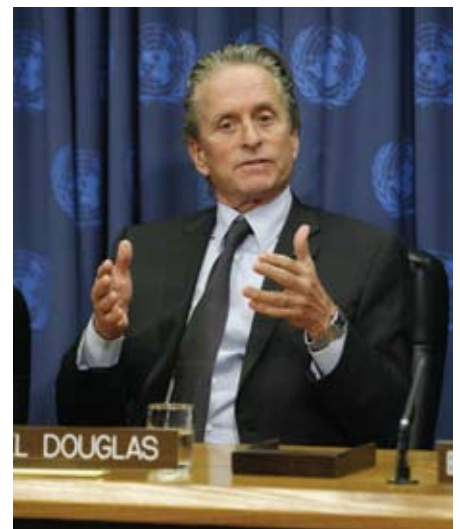
**Q:** You are one of the world's most celebrated actors and film producers. You have also been the United Nations Messenger of Peace since 1998 and have campaigned tirelessly for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Could you share with us how you became engaged in the nuclear disarmament issue and how you became a UN Messenger of Peace?

**A:** Do you know a scientist and philosopher named Buckminster Fuller? He was an American architect, author and inventor who devoted his life to the issue of humanity's chances of surviving successfully on Earth. I heard him speak a couple of times when I was at the University of California. Then I read one of his books, *Spaceship Earth*, which gave me a whole different perspective on the vulnerability of our planet and made me recognize that nuclear weapons were the largest evil in terms of their destructive powers. So I think that was the beginning of my interest in the issue, philosophically.

But let me elaborate a little on my background and my interests. When I was growing up in New York City, we used to have air raid drills. This was after Russia announced that it had conducted its first nuclear test in 1949. If there was a bright flash, you were supposed to get under your desk. Or they'd have fire drills and an alarm would ring and you'd all file down into the basement and lean up against the walls. I remember my father in California had a bomb shelter built in the back of his yard. At five or six years old, it was hard to grasp this thing, this white light. It was so powerful. And there was obviously a nightmare quality about it – a monster quality – which I think always haunted me. Even as a kid.

Later on, I produced and starred in *The China Syndrome*. Although it dealt specifically with nuclear energy/nuclear power, I began to understand the ramifications and the half life of plutonium and how long it would stay with us. What

was really an epiphany for me was when we had that accident at Three Mile Island in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It happened just 10 days after our movie opened. The movie script talked about a "China



MICHAEL DOUGLAS ADDRESSING PARTICIPANTS AT THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL MEETING.



Syndrome” or a meltdown and said it would destroy an area the size of Pennsylvania. That left a really lasting impression on me.

And then finally, I’ve been doing some homework about where my parents came from. My father came from Belarus and when I tried to find out where his town was, I discovered that it was basically eliminated because it was downwind from Chernobyl, which is on the Ukrainian border with Belarus. So it was a cumulative effect as far as where my interest in the nuclear disarmament issue comes from.

**Q:** *Is it this engagement that also made you interested in becoming a UN Messenger of Peace and taking this course forward on a larger level?*

**A:** Yes. There are so many issues to deal with in the world. I decided to really focus my energy particularly on this one. As an actor or “celebrity”, it’s easier to talk to politicians and diplomats in the world. They’re more accessible to you. A lot of political leaders, who are unable to socialize like most people, watch movies. So there’s a familiarity they have with actors. I’ve found sometimes that they’re more comfortable with you and it’s easier to reach them, because they feel like they know you before they’ve met you.

**Q:** *You grew up during the beginning of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race in the 1950s, when hundreds of nuclear tests were being conducted. Do you remember anything about the nuclear testing debate and was this something that affected you as well in terms of your subsequent interest in the ban on nuclear testing?*

**A:** Not at the time because I was fairly young. I was born in 1944, the year before nuclear weapons were first initiated and I certainly hope to see them eliminated in my lifetime.

In hindsight, as I began to understand the issue and more particularly, the health ramifications of all that nuclear weapon testing, this was something that made me interested in the issue. I guess the last real analysis in the States was about 10 years ago when they estimated around 100,000 cases of thyroid cancer caused by the fallout of nuclear testing. So there was certainly a health issue.

**Q:** *All the proponents of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) were very pleased that you participated in the Fourth Ministerial Meeting in support of the CTBT’s entry into force in New York last September. During that meeting, you drew attention to some of the issues that are not so often covered in this debate, which is something you touched upon just now: the environmental and health aspects of the Treaty. So do you also think that the CTBT is important for human health and the environment?*

**A:** Yes, I think the CTBT’s seismic monitoring stations have a tremendous effect on deterring and detecting any nuclear testing. But they can also detect any seismic activity in terms of tsunamis, like the tragedies that happened in Asia, in Indonesia and Thailand, a few years ago. Seismic data are really helpful for tsunami warning centres in terms of being able to monitor and detect tsunamis much more quickly and spread the message.

**Q:** *Yes, these are some of the important potential civil and scientific benefits of the Treaty and its verification regime, which I think will be expanded on a lot over the next few decades.*

*If we go back to the CTBT, it bans all nuclear explosions on Earth - everywhere and by everyone. Nearly 150 countries have already ratified the Treaty, including all of*

*Europe, most other U.S. allies, also Russia. But not the United States. Why, in your view, is the CTBT important?*

**A:** For a number of reasons. I think it’s a key part of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. If we can at least get all of the Big Five (the five nuclear weapon States: the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China) to ratify, then we have a much better opportunity for the Treaty over the next couple of years. It will certainly help stop a nuclear arms race if it enters into force. It will be much more difficult to continue to build up arsenals if there is the inability to test. The CTBT will set a norm for the world which will make it extremely difficult for anybody, including those who have not signed, to continue testing.

*continues on next page*

### Biographical note



*American Academy Award-winning actor/producer Michael Douglas is internationally recognized for his commitment to nuclear disarmament. He is a board*

*member of the Ploughshares Fund, an organization that works to halt nuclear proliferation. Mr. Douglas is also a strong supporter of the Global Security Institute, which strives for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In 1998 he was appointed United Nations Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan where his primary concentration is in the areas of nuclear non-proliferation and the control of small arms. ■*

## In the spotlight



MICHAEL DOUGLAS UNDERSCORES HIS SUPPORT FOR THE CTBT'S EARLY ENTRY INTO FORCE.

This will apply even if we cannot get all the Annex 2 countries on board - and I think you've got to break these up after China between India and Pakistan and North Korea that are yet to sign. And Egypt and Indonesia, Iran, and Israel that are yet to ratify.

As far as the U.S. is concerned, I'm fairly optimistic. We've heard what President Obama has said and more recently what Secretary of State Clinton has said about the Treaty. I would hope that within the next couple of years, it will be ratified.

I'm hoping that the current terrible economic environment and the vulnerability that it has created will help expedite the Treaty's ratification. Nuclear security is as important as economic security. We who have been working on the nuclear disarmament issue for a long time are more optimistic than we've ever been before. There is a momentum. And the time is right to move ahead

with Russia, too. Russia tried to approach us a few years ago on deeper reductions. Between the United States and Russia, we control over 90 percent of the weaponry in the world. And the economics are debilitating for Russia too in terms of maintaining its stockpiles.

The combination of a U.S. ratification of the CTBT and a dramatic reduction of weapons would be a great first start.

**Q:** *I know that you have lobbied on Capitol Hill before against the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW)<sup>1</sup>. If you were to talk to U.S. senators about the CTBT today, what would you say to persuade them to ratify the Treaty?*

**A:** I'd tell them that the CTBT is essential for reducing the arms race because it prevents

<sup>1</sup> **RRW:** A proposal by the Bush administration for a new, advanced nuclear warhead design to provide a long-lasting, low maintenance nuclear force for the United States. The U.S. Congress denied funding for the project in 2009.

nuclear proliferation to a large degree. I would advise them that the CTBT is strongly and clearly verifiable, which is very important. And unless we, the original signatories, ratify, we won't have much influence on the other countries that haven't yet done so. It would generally enhance worldwide monitoring capabilities if the CTBT went into effect so that we would be able to police the world much more effectively.

There's an argument that opponents of the Treaty make about the Stockpile Stewardship Program and about maintaining these stockpiles. Everything I've seen in defense is that there is enough ability to maintain the existing arsenal. I think there will be a debate. But based on what President Obama has accomplished in his first 30 days, which really nobody in our country has come close to except perhaps President Roosevelt, and knowing how clearly he's talked about the CTBT, I'm optimistic.

**Q:** *You talked about the other eight countries that haven't yet ratified the Treaty. Do you think that a U.S. ratification can have an impact on these other eight States?*

**A:** I certainly think it will limit their options. Let's look at India and Pakistan right now - and Israel - and Iran. U.S. ratification will certainly have an effect because it's going to strengthen the norm against testing and in a way, limit their further abilities to develop nuclear weapons. The irony is that the U.S. public has supported the CTBT all along. Back in 1997 when they last conducted a poll about the Treaty, over 70 percent of the country supported ratification. If it were approved by the U.S., it would carry some momentum with it. But regardless of whether some other countries approve the Treaty or not, a strong international norm against testing would severely limit what they could do. That alone would help other countries sign up. ■