Opening Remarks on Hiroshima’s Nuclear Disarmament Initiatives

By

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I very much welcome this opportunity to participate in this event focused on the many efforts of the Prefecture and City of Hiroshima to promote the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We are especially privileged to have with us today the honourable Governor of the Hiroshima Prefecture, Mr. Hidehiko Yuzaki, as well as the honourable Mayor of Hiroshima, Mr. Kazumi Matsui.

I also wish to thank Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe from the Japan Institute of International Affairs for inviting me to speak today.

There is, without question, a certain effect produced by this word, “Hiroshima” that invites silent respect and inspires actions in the field of nuclear disarmament.

I have little doubt that the memories of what happened there on 6 August 1945—the world’s first atomic bombing—combined with the memories of the Nagasaki bombing a few days later, have helped to prevent another use of such weapons.

Yet I do not believe that those memories will alone be sufficient to prevent any future use. The world community has long agreed that nuclear disarmament offers the only absolute guarantee against any such use.

Those memories, however, still have a tremendously important role to play in making the case for renewed international efforts to eliminate these horrible weapons. It is fair to say that the resurgence of a humanitarian approach to disarmament relies very heavily upon those memories, for they help to clarify the extent that the use of such weapons cannot in any way be reconciled with international humanitarian law, given their indiscriminate effects.

The high quality of the political leadership at the city and prefectural levels of Hiroshima is clearly apparent in the personal commitments by the Governor and Mayor to include nuclear disarmament as a high priority.

We all know that these leaders, after all, have many other urgent local priorities to address. In this light, their statements and actions for disarmament display a quality that is all too rare in these days of nuclear threats, soaring military expenditures, terrorist attacks, and flagrant challenges to the rule of law.

That rare quality is summed up in the word, statesmanship. It is apparent in the willingness and capability of political leaders to act in the interests of one’s wider community, and in the case of nuclear weapons, this means both local citizens and all humanity.

I view the Governor’s “Hiroshima for Global Peace” plan announced in 2011 as a good example of this type of statesmanship. That plan attached a special importance to nuclear disarmament, yet also addressed this challenge in its wider political setting.

Needless to say, this is also the approach taken by the UN Charter. We sometimes forget,
in the avalanche of daily news reports about persisting strife in this world, that the Charter has provisions addressing disarmament, the regulation of armaments, the duty to resolve disputes peacefully, the prohibition of threats or the use of force, the promotion of social and economic development, and the advancement of the rule of law. The message of the Charter is that all of these goals must be pursued to strengthen international peace and security. The Hiroshima for Global Peace plan seems to me to be very much in line with these solemn goals.

I also wish to salute the Prefecture for commissioning the 2014 Hiroshima Report, which evaluates the achievement of agreed multilateral goals in nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and nuclear security. I commend the Japan Institute of International Affairs and its Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation for preparing that report.

Together with others that have been issued by groups in civil society, this report is helping to establish some accountability for the fulfilment of commitments and promises in these fields. I view these reports as reinforcing a parallel process being undertaken by States in such arenas as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conferences and the General Assembly’s First Committee.

Of course, the current and previous Mayors of Hiroshima have also demonstrated great statesmanship in advancing nuclear disarmament. Jointly with their counterparts in Nagasaki, they created the Mayors for Peace initiative which over the years has now gathered support from representatives of some 6,000 cities in 158 countries. Their work in promoting disarmament education is another extraordinary example of the statesmanship they have shown in the service not just of students in their respective cities but of students everywhere—this is a form of statesmanship that will even benefit future generations.

It should not be surprising to see municipal leaders join in calling for nuclear disarmament, given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that nuclear weapons would produce if they are used again on cities. And let us not forget that since 2008 most of the world’s population now lives in towns and cities. This is potentially a huge constituency of support for disarmament.

So I will close my remarks today by commending Governor Yuzaki and Mayor Matsui, and their prefectural and city partners in Nagasaki, for the statesmanship they have shown in working for a world free of nuclear weapons. May you have every success in the years ahead.