Keynote Address

For a Nuclear-Weapon Free, Peaceful, and Just World

By

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It is a great honour for me to join with you today in the year of the 60th anniversary of the World Conferences against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. I wish to thank Hiroshi Taka, the co-chair of the Steering Committee for inviting me to this event, as well as all his colleagues who have contributed to making this conference possible.

Allow me to go a step further and congratulate all the individuals and groups associated with these World Conferences. I know how hard it is these days to keep a persistent focus on achieving global nuclear disarmament, especially with many other important issues competing for our attention. The fact that you have been continuing your efforts despite these other distractions gives me hope that one day we together will succeed in achieving this great goal.

Your spirit of resolute determination is precisely what is most needed today in sustaining and strengthening a broad-based international campaign to eliminate these horrible weapons. Your commitment will help in overcoming perhaps the greatest obstacle standing in the way of achieving this goal—and that obstacle is the lack of political will.

The three themes of this particular World Conference help to explain the solidarity you have maintained, despite the diversity of your many groups. This Conference is first of all and most obviously about achieving global nuclear disarmament—but that is not all. It recognizes that disarmament does not exist in isolation, and that simultaneous efforts are needed to deal with the larger problems of war and armed conflicts. And the more one looks at this particular challenge, the more apparent it becomes that a strong sense of injustice is often at the root of many armed conflicts around the world.

So while some of your groups focus on world peace, some seek to strengthen the rule of law so that justice can prevail both within States and in the relations between them, and some are working directly on nuclear disarmament, the themes of this Conference unite the work of all your groups in a grand common cause.

I think you already know that you have partners in pursuing all three of these themes at the United Nations—and by this I include the Secretary-General, the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the Secretariat, and the vast majority of our Member States who come to our universal organization with the intention of advancing all three of these goals.

You also have the support of countless non-governmental organizations around the world. While the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament is still quite apparent, I see a process unfolding with growing support worldwide for this goal. I am impressed at the many innovative initiatives that you and your colleagues in civil society have launched to expand the diversity of groups working for nuclear disarmament.

The fact that Mayors for Peace, for example, has been able to gain the support of representatives of over 6,100 cities in 158 countries is a marvellous achievement, and I am sure this campaign is far from over. It is also enormously encouraging to see the support disarmament has received from international groups of parliamentarians—including the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. I feel the same way about the signature campaigns that have been launched here in Japan, which have often gained many millions of signatures on specific petitions.
I cannot begin to list all these initiatives, and I have only mentioned a few to make a point: hard-working “peace groups” are not today alone in bearing all the burdens of pursuing global nuclear disarmament. Women have been pursuing this goal virtually since the advent of nuclear weapons, and their efforts were largely responsible for the adoption of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, an achievement that was also due to dedicated contributions from physicians around the world who understood the human harm caused by fallout from those atmospheric nuclear tests. Religious leaders of virtually all denominations have long been doing what they can to contribute to this great cause of nuclear disarmament.

Whenever I get discouraged over the lack of real progress in this field, I think about the sheer diversity of these groups and I become more convinced than ever that we are all not only working for one of the greatest goals in human history, but that we have, together, both the means and the will to achieve it.

Like you, however, I too am troubled that we are not seeing greater concrete progress in this field. We see long-term, well-funded plans to modernize nuclear arsenals, but no plans or negotiations for achieving nuclear disarmament. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence is still part of the security policies of many countries—so many, in fact, that most people today live in countries that either have such weapons or are members of a nuclear alliance. These facts are difficult to reconcile with the obligation of all parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

Yet this is not the whole story. Multilateral initiatives are underway to turn the tide in favour of disarmament. Next month, the UN will host two commemorative events—the International Day against Nuclear Tests on 10 September (this is usually marked on 29 August), and the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on 26 September. These will be opportunities for civil society groups and concerned States to come together and reaffirm their commitment to eliminating both nuclear tests and nuclear weapons.

In October, the UN General Assembly’s First Committee will consider and adopt about twenty resolutions dealing with nuclear weapons issues, especially nuclear disarmament. As in years past, I know that these will likely be subject to divided votes, yet virtually every year there are at least some surprises, as States change their customary votes from against to abstain, or from abstain to support. The greater the pressure from the diplomatic community and civil society, the greater will be likelihood this will occur.

In early December, Austria will host the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, which follows earlier successful conferences on this subject held in Oslo in 2013 and in Mexico in 2014. These conferences are very helpful in clarifying beyond any doubt the real consequences for humanity and the natural environment resulting from the use of nuclear weapons. A group called the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has calculated that a nuclear war using around 100 weapons anywhere in the world would disrupt the global climate and agricultural production on a scale that would jeopardize the lives of more than two billion people.

Can we seriously believe that nuclear deterrence will forever guarantee against any future use of such weapons, either by accident or by intention? The 189 States parties to the NPT certainly do not think so. At their treaty Review Conferences in 2000 and 2010 they
agreed by consensus that the total elimination of nuclear weapons offered the only absolute guarantee against the use of such weapons.

This brings me to another forthcoming event at the UN—next May, we will host the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the ninth such conference in the 44-year history of the treaty. This will be a very significant event for a number of reasons.

The nuclear-weapon States will be called upon to report what they have accomplished in implementing their treaty commitments relating to nuclear disarmament, and non-nuclear States will have an opportunity to say what they think of the progress made, or lack of it. This is why they call it a “review” conference—the record of achievements and setbacks is open for public examination both by States parties and by civil society. And I have little doubt that the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons will be a major theme of the deliberations, especially in the aftermath of the Vienna Conference on this issue.

I also believe that the future of the initiative to establish a Middle East zone will have a significant impact on the future of the treaty. It is worth recalling that the original proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that region first appeared in 1974 and it has been annually endorsed by the General Assembly each year since without a single negative vote. In 1995, the establishment of such a zone was part of the “package” deal leading to the indefinite extension of the NPT. So it is clear that the future of this initiative will have implications extending far beyond the Middle East.

One of the mandates established at the 2010 Review Conference concerned the convening of a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. That conference did not yet take place and efforts are continuing so that it will occur before the 2015 Review Conference. If it does not, this would certainly be a deeply disappointing setback that I believe would colour the entire conference, if not jeopardize hope for a consensus outcome.

Of course, 2015 will mark an important year for another reason. It will be the year when the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—and the rest of the world—will mark the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings. We are enormously fortunate that many hibakusha will have the opportunity to participate in those events, because their testimonies without doubt offer the most compelling evidence possible of the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

The year 2015 will therefore be very likely a time of high expectations for real progress in nuclear disarmament. People want to see concrete results, not ambiguous words about distant goals or numerous preconditions required for future progress. There is probably some truth to the observation that progress in nuclear disarmament will substantially influence the future of the NPT. It will most certainly influence any hope for strengthening nuclear non-proliferation controls, because the non-nuclear-weapon States are increasingly objecting to the old double standard of demanding ever more intrusive non-proliferation controls with no such expectations or deadlines required for disarmament.

Now, though I am speaking with you today through an interpreter, I am convinced that we are actually speaking the same language. We come from different countries. We work in different institutions. Yet we fully understand the importance of this issue of nuclear
disarmament. We understand the many obstacles preventing its early achievement. And I am
certain we agree on what is needed to make progress.

We need to help our fellow citizens to understand the benefits of eliminating these
weapons and the horrible consequences of failing to do so. We need to challenge the view
that nuclear disarmament is somehow utopian or impractical to achieve, or a subject best left
to the experts. We need to prove that these weapons have no value—political or military—
and that their perpetuation only sows the seeds of future proliferation.

And as we work to eliminate these weapons, we must also work on limiting
conventional arms. A world without nuclear weapons, but replete with conventional
weapons, is not likely to advance the interests of either peace or security.

But to return to the title of this conference, I agree that if we wish to pursue the larger
goals of peace and justice, we will also need to work for the full observance of the
fundamental principles and norms of the UN Charter. This applies in particular to the
requirement to solve disputes peacefully, the prohibition on the threat or use of force, the
protection of human rights, the advancement of social and economic development, and the
continued growth of the rule of law.

Of course, nuclear disarmament has its own independent contributions to make to
world peace—especially its benefits in building mutual trust and confidence—and therefore
must not be postponed until peace is first achieved.

Please therefore accept my very best wishes in all your work to move the agenda of
nuclear disarmament forward. Not only your fellow citizens, but also future generations will
be grateful for your hard work, as will people throughout our global human family.

In closing, I would like to recall the words of the British disarmament advocate, Philip
Noel-Baker, who said the following upon receiving his Nobel Peace Prize in 1959:

In the age when the atom has been split, the moon encircled, diseases conquered, is
disarmament so difficult a matter that it must remain a distant dream?

He posed the right question. Let us dream of a peaceful and just world. But let us do
more than dream. Let us resolve to pursue it relentlessly until it is finally achieved—a
peaceful and just world free of all nuclear weapons. What a great dream to ponder—but a far
greater one to fulfil.