“Challenging the Status Quo: A Generation Rising for Peace, Justice, and Nuclear Abolition”

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Organized by Ban All Nukes generation

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Delegates, colleagues, friends, it is a real pleasure to be here today with you. I want to thank Ban All Nukes Generation for the invitation to speak with you about this important topic.

Let me start by saying that I am always inspired by your energy and zeal, your passion and your devotion to our shared vision – a safer and more secure world; a world that is free of the terrible dangers posed nuclear weapons.

We are here today to address the question of how to engage the youth of the world in our urgent cause of the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Sadly, these last few years have not been the best of times for those of us advocating nuclear disarmament.

Over the course of the last twenty years, we have seen great strides in the reduction of deployed nuclear arsenals, increased transparency by nuclear-armed States and even the rollback of nascent nuclear weapons programmes in several countries.

Unfortunately, about two years ago that progress appeared to stall.

The status of nuclear disarmament presents a bleak picture. Beyond the implementation of the New Start Treaty in 2018, there is no vision for nuclear disarmament – no articulation by nuclear-armed States about what steps they propose to take to achieve the elimination of these weapons of terror.

Instead, we are confronted by increased tensions between nuclear-weapon States and a reversion to outmoded Cold War mind sets, including veiled threats to use nuclear weapons.

We are again subject to dangerous rhetoric about the utility of nuclear weapons and the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence.

We see regional strategic competition that could lead to dangerous nuclear arms races.

And we are presented with expensive and far-reaching modernization programmes that will entrench nuclear weapons for decade to come – out to 2070 in one case. This would be one hundred years after the NPT entered into force.

Speaking of the NPT, the negative trends I have outlined have placed significant pressure on the Treaty and, in particular, the grand bargain that lies at its core: the synergistic interplay between disarmament and non-proliferation, that progress on one is dependent on progress on the other, and that all States parties have an obligation to achieve both.

Five years ago, States parties to the NPT agreed on a 64-point Action Plan to advance the Treaty’s objectives across all three of its mutually reinforcing pillars.

As we all know, from a disarmament perspective – that is, pillar one of the NPT – there has been disconcertingly little progress.

Yes, we have seen some welcome transparency measures by nuclear-weapon States and a commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons.
But these are no substitute for announced measures to pursue further cuts to nuclear arsenals, a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty in force or even the symbolic declarations of unambiguous single purpose doctrines or no-first use pledges.

Rather, non-nuclear weapon States are being told that conditions are too difficult for disarmament and that the Action Plan does not impose a timeframe on its implementation.

Based on my experience, I can tell you that a clear majority of non-nuclear weapon States did not agree to an open-ended Action Plan. They did not sign up to one that will only be fulfilled at some distant point in the future when the time is right.

They want to see it implemented with an urgency befitting the terrible dangers that nuclear weapons pose to our common security.

I am sure the Treaty will survive this Review Conference.

But, if the Treaty’s essential bargain is not fulfilled, if the onus of compliance remains with the non-nuclear weapon States, its members may begin to question whether it continues to serve their interests.

And a weakened NPT would be a dire outcome for the international community.

The NPT is by no means a perfect treaty, but it has played an essential role in reducing the existential dangers posed by nuclear weapons. It has provided verifiable pledges not to obtain nuclear weapons by almost the entire world and it is the only active mechanism for pursuing nuclear disarmament.

The nuclear-weapon States also benefit from these collective security measures.

The world is becoming more, not less, complicated, with a profusion of powerful actors, including non-state actors, and multiple regional rivalries, including between nuclear-armed States. To this you can also add emerging transnational security threats such as cyber warfare.

As the youth of the today, this is the world you are inheriting. It is a world in which the threat of a nuclear explosion – intentional or accidental – has not diminished.

All of this negative sentiment leads me to the obvious question: What can we, concerned citizens of the world, do about it?

First of all, to those who argue that the conditions are not ripe for further disarmament measures, those who claim we have picked all the low-hanging fruit, those who would throw the whole enterprise into the “too hard basket”, I would say this:

So what? Yes, the pursuit of a nuclear weapon-free world is a difficult task. Surely we all knew that when we signed up?
All it means is that we need to redouble our efforts – to roll up our sleeves and get on with the job. If we try to convince ourselves that the task is too hard, we might end up succeeding.

To you – the younger generation engaged in our cause, I say: Keep the faith. Stay the course.

Passion and commitment are easy when times are good. They are much harder to sustain when the going gets tough.

So do not meekly accept the status quo – push back and demand action.

You should take heed of the wisdom and experience of those who have come before you – to emulate their successes and to learn from their failures. There is an accumulated wealth of knowledge out there and I urge you to make the best use of it.

Learn from the hibakusha, many of whom have made the long journey to this Review Conference to tell their story.

Seventy years ago, this group of survivors endured the worst human-made catastrophe in history and lived. If you ever doubt the importance or urgency of the need to eliminate nuclear weapons, listen to their stories. Hear about the horrors of nuclear warfare from those that were its victims.

But the most important task you can undertake is to spread the word, to educate your peers and to mobilize them to take up the cause of nuclear disarmament.

This may be a difficult assignment. Although there is undoubtedly broad support for the abolition of nuclear weapons, I am concerned that there is too great an apathy about the dangers that they continue to pose today.

Your generation did not experience the fallout shelters and the duck and cover drills. They cannot recall the serious debates about the ludicrous concept of nuclear war-fighting strategies. They may not be aware of just how close the world came to nuclear annihilation.

You must remind them.

You must inject a sense of urgency into the complacency. You have the tools to do so. Mine is a generation of print and paper, yours if far more technologically savvy. The mechanisms to reach millions are at your fingertips. Understanding how to make social media work effectively for nuclear disarmament campaigns will be a significant factor in raising awareness and soliciting support.

Education remains an important tool for reaching your peers and those even younger. Indeed, there is no age too young to begin learning about these important issues.

Many States have enthusiastically rallied to the flag of disarmament and non-proliferation education. Japan has been one of the staunchest supporters and I am glad of their continued efforts.
However, more can be done. Education about the perils of nuclear weapons should be in the curriculum of every country.

In this endeavor you have a ready partner in the Office of Disarmament Affairs. Our publication, *Action for Disarmament*, draws the attention of young people around the world to the promotion of international peace and security through disarmament. It offers 10 practical steps to help young people mobilize, act and promote the UN’s disarmament ideals through their schools, their communities and beyond.

Perhaps the final suggestion I would make to you is to remember the power of the ballot box. There is political power in numbers and I encourage you to remind your local elected representatives that nuclear weapons still exist and urge them to take action.

In working to achieve our common goal of a world without nuclear weapons, I urge you to seek innovative solutions, to think outside the box and to be bold.

Your generation did not invent nuclear weapons, but it will be your responsibility to shoulder the burden of nuclear disarmament. With energy and determination you can succeed.

The future is not defined and I hope yours is one in which the shadow of nuclear weapons is gone forever.