Opening Remarks

By

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Urgent and United Action Toward a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World

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Mayor Sugenoya, Parliamentary Vice-Minister Tokunaga, Mayor Taue, Director General Amano, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to declare open this twenty-third United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues. I wish first of all to thank the Government of Japan—which has long been a global champion of progress in disarmament and non-proliferation—and the City of Matsumoto for hosting this event. Their commitment to peace and disarmament is apparent in the decision to continue to host this Conference as planned, despite the devastating earthquake and tsunami. I wish to pay my respects to the many who lost their lives and to extend my deep sympathy to those who lost loves ones and those whose livelihoods were destroyed as a result of the disaster. The entire world stands in solidarity with Japan as it recovers from this natural disaster, while continuing its dedicated efforts in pursuit of world peace and disarmament. It is fitting indeed that this conference coincides with the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the “World Peace City Declaration” by the City of Matsumoto.

I also commend the involvement of the citizens here who organized more than twenty peace and disarmament-related events during the past few weeks, all of which helping to cultivate a culture of peace and disarmament, especially within the younger generation.

One of the purposes of this series of conferences is to encourage cities, local governments, and schools to appreciate how and why disarmament matters to all. I view our special session on Friday with local high school students as a fine opportunity not just to encourage a new generation to pursue disarmament goals, but to enable participants to hear these students’ views—the views of tomorrow’s leaders in this field.

For the citizens of Matsumoto, the threats of weapons of mass destruction are not mere abstractions, given that this beautiful city was the site of a sarin nerve gas attack in June 1994, which resulted in seven fatalities and about 200 other victims.

Preventing such attacks in the future, and eliminating all weapons of mass destruction all together, will require both national action and extensive international cooperation. This brings me to another key purpose of these conferences—to promote the establishment and growth of a community of scholars, officials, journalists, and international diplomats who share a common interest in advancing disarmament goals. These conferences provide an opportunity to establish new professional contacts and meet friends, to enable participants to become more familiar with ongoing activities in this field, and to keep better informed of future events.

The impressive list of speakers and guests—with diverse backgrounds both inside and outside of government—reflects the complexity of the challenge of achieving disarmament. When all nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are finally eliminated, I believe it will be due to the efforts of many nations, many years of close cooperation and partnership across borders, and many efforts by civil society. And UN Conferences such as this one today will make their own contributions to this collective effort.
Our deliberations will begin with a session focused on the role of the people, a beginning that symbolizes the growing role of civil society in advancing disarmament goals. To the extent that the world is able to sustain some momentum for disarmament, much of it will be due to strong political support and advocacy from the people.

Our second session will focus on a very timely issue, the implementation of the Action Plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. It was a welcome development indeed when the States Parties were able to reach consensus on 64 steps to strengthen each of the pillars of the Treaty, relating to disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Conference also took steps to advance the goal of achieving a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The latter is the subject of a conference to be convened next year by the UN Secretary-General and the Governments of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East—an event that will be organized in consultation with States of the region. In addition, the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference will open next year, again underscoring the timeliness of this issue for our present gathering.

Given that only two countries possess well over 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons, it is also appropriate that the third session of our conference would focus on what will follow the new START treaty. What are the prospects for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty? And will future negotiations remain bilateral between the Russian Federation and the United States, or will other States possessing such weapons increasingly have to be brought into this disarmament process, as envisaged by the terms of Article VI of the NPT? I note that the Security Council’s Resolution 1887, adopted on 24 September 2009, called upon all States—not just NPT parties—to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear arms reduction and disarmament, as well as a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

Our fourth session will focus on the stalemate at the Conference on Disarmament, and will discuss possible ways to commence negotiations on a fissile materials treaty, whatever its scope. This session will occur just hours after the President of the General Assembly will have convened a plenary meeting to follow up on the 24 September 2010 “High Level Meeting” on Revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations. This subject is of special interest to the Secretary-General, who will address the plenary meeting.

The subject of our fifth session relates to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, a subject that has been clouded by the tragedy at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. This is not just a timely subject, but one that is highly appropriate to address here in Japan, where the “lessons learned” from that disaster will hopefully inspire many future improvements worldwide in nuclear safety. I wish to acknowledge here the longstanding contributions by the IAEA in the field of nuclear safety, as most recently illustrated by the ministerial conference last June on nuclear safety organized by the IAEA. That event began with a five-point proposal by Director General Amano to establish a post-Fukushima nuclear safety framework, and concluded with a Declaration on Nuclear
Our fifth session will also cover preparations for the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul. All together, the issues discussed at this fifth session will be useful as preparations continue for the High Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security that the Secretary-General will convene on 22 September in New York.

The sixth and final session will address the issue of a nuclear weapons convention, in particular the challenge of advancing it from a mere vision to a reality. The United Nations has been working on global nuclear disarmament since the General Assembly adopted its first resolution in January 1946, and the initiative of pursuing a nuclear weapon convention—or a framework of mutually reinforcing instruments with the same goal—was highlighted in the Secretary-General’s five-point nuclear disarmament proposal of 24 October 2008. The goal of pursuing such a convention has been endorsed—by over 130 UN Member States; by national parliamentarians; by Nobel Peace Laureates; by Mayors for Peace (whose 2011 “Cities are Not Targets” petition gained over 1 million signatures that are now on display at the UN’s permanent disarmament exhibit); by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; and by countless other initiatives by non-governmental organizations worldwide.

These six sessions, combined with the special session with the high school students, will certainly offer considerable food for thought on how the world can advance long-overdue progress in the field of nuclear disarmament.

I will now close my brief remarks today by wishing all participants a productive conference, and by expressing my appreciation to all who have worked so hard to organize it. I wish to thank Mayor Sugeno, and his staff both for their hospitality and for their many efforts in making this conference possible. And I also wish to recognize and to thank Taijiro Kimura, the director of the UN’s Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, and the Centre’s staff, for their tireless efforts not just in organizing this conference, but in promoting United Nations disarmament goals since the Centre’s move to Kathmandu in 2008.

Finally, on behalf of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, I would like to thank those countries that have provided financial and in-kind contributions to the Regional Centre over the years, and count on their continued and generous support to carry out its disarmament programmes, which are designed to meet genuine security needs throughout the region.

This is a very auspicious beginning for a conference that will deal with some of the most difficult problems on the international security agenda. None of these will be easy to solve. But let us all take some inspiration from the Japanese proverb, nana korobi, yaoki—fall seven times, rise eight times. It is only through hard work and perseverance that great goals are accomplished. Let us resume this work today.