Realizing World Peace through Disarmament:
A Message from the United Nations to the Next World Citizens

By

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President Takutoshi Inoue, Vice President Takahiro Shinyo, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

What an honour it is for me to speak with you today as you begin to commemorate the 125\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Kwans\textsuperscript{ei} Gakuin University (KGU), which will officially occur next year.

I understand that your school motto is “Mastery for Service”, which would also be a fitting motto for our event today, “The Second World Citizen Forum”.

I say this because good citizenship implies service to a larger community beyond ourselves. But the responsibilities of world citizenship are even larger because they relate to efforts on behalf of all humanity, not just the interests of any one country.

In my past visits to Japan, I have been impressed by the extent that actions on behalf of the world community are recognized and believed to be in your national interest as well. This is seen in Japan’s longstanding efforts to address the problem of climate change, for example.

It is apparent in its generous provisions of foreign development assistance.

It is seen in Japan’s role as a global champion of human rights.

It is evident in Japan’s longstanding support for the United Nations.

And I must say it is certainly apparent in the support that the people and governments of Japan have given to global nuclear disarmament over so many decades.

I am deeply impressed, because my own career has been in the public service, so I feel we share a profound sense of duty—to ourselves, to our local communities, to the world, and indeed to future generations—to serve the common interests of humanity.

For all of these reasons, I am humbled to have this opportunity to join you today to discuss a very difficult question—the relationship between peace and disarmament, and its implications for future world citizens.

Many of you here today might not know that global nuclear disarmament is one of our oldest goals at the UN. It was the subject of the UN General Assembly’s first resolution, adopted in January 1946. In that year, the UN Secretariat had a very small office working on disarmament issues and 67 years later, I am the head of that office—we are still working on this challenge.

Have we “failed” because this goal has not yet been achieved? Do the nuclear
weapons that continue to exist worldwide constitute evidence of this failure?

Actually no. First, such a conclusion would ignore all the progress that has been achieved over many years in this field. In the mid-1980s, it was estimated that there were some 75,000 nuclear weapons in this world. Today, we believe the number is closer to 19,000, about a quarter of the figure at the peak of the Cold War.

Should we rejoice at this reduction? No again, because it does not go far enough, and “zero” is still widely viewed as a utopian goal. The reductions have not been verified and are reversible. There is little transparency over the numbers and locations of nuclear weapons—in some countries, none at all. States possessing these weapons are actively seeking to improve them and their means of delivery, with plans extending decades into the future. Even today, after all these efforts to achieve global nuclear disarmament, more people live in countries that either possess nuclear weapons or are members of nuclear alliances than those that do not.

Yet despite the magnitude of the disarmament challenge we continue to face in 2013, we have every reason to recognize and celebrate the achievements that have been made. And I am speaking here about much more than simply the declared reductions over the last few decades.

For example, even though the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has not yet entered into force, people throughout the world share the view that it is not legitimate to test such weapons. This was apparent in the overwhelming international denunciations of the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998, and the tests by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in 2006 and 2009.

Today, more and more countries recognize—and are stating publicly—that any use of nuclear weapons would also be illegitimate because of the many ways that their effects violate so many of the most fundamental laws of war. For over six decades, your hibakusha have been reminding the world of the catastrophic humanitarian effects of the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These effects were specifically noted and reflected in language adopted by consensus at the 2010 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In March, a major conference will be convened in Oslo, Norway, to address these humanitarian effects—a conference that will further help to advance the cause of global nuclear disarmament.

Along with this growing awareness of the uniquely inhumane effects of these weapons, we have witnessed the emergence of what is often called “the nuclear taboo”—a growing international norm prohibiting their use.

Unfortunately, all States that possess nuclear weapons or that belong to nuclear alliances continue to embrace the threat of use. This is the essence of the doctrine of
nuclear deterrence, which is based on little more than the fragile hope that one country’s
annihilation by nuclear attack can only be prevented by preserving a credible means of
retaliating in kind. During the Cold War, nuclear deterrence was often viewed as a
bilateral affair relating to the nuclear weapon competition between the Soviet Union and
the United States—a relationship that resembled what someone once called “two
scorpions in a bottle”, with each afraid to strike first.

That was by any definition a dangerous period, as reflected in the tensions
surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Yet today that bottle contains not just two
but at least nine scorpions.

Given the horrible humanitarian and environmental consequences from any war
involving the use of nuclear weapons—consequences that would not only cross national
borders but affect the entire planet—citizens everywhere are quite justified in raising
their voices on behalf of progress in nuclear disarmament.

There is enormous potential for progress in this great collective effort, provided
the people are willing to pursue this goal, willing to encourage diverse organized groups
throughout society to work for its achievement, and willing to extend this cooperation to
the peoples of other nations.

After all, if these weapons are today illegitimate to test, and illegitimate to use, then it
does not seem inconceivable to me that we will soon reach the day when they are also
illegitimate both to threaten to use and even to possess.

There are many signs we are approaching that great destiny in world history.

First, as I have mentioned, we see the declining numbers of nuclear weapons.

Second, the public is continuing to demand their elimination, often
overwhelmingly both within countries and in initiatives crossing national borders. One
could say that the “genie” of nuclear disarmament has left its bottle and will not return.

Third, these weapons are increasingly viewed not only as illegitimate but also
irrelevant in addressing pressing security concerns, in particular the threat of catastrophic
acts by terrorists. Nuclear weapons are useless in either deterring such acts or in
responding to them.

Fourth, more and more people recognize that the very existence of such weapons
implies their threat or risk of use. The great Russian playwright, Anton Chekov, once
wrote that when a play begins with the appearance of a rifle hanging on a wall—rest
assured that when the play is ended, that rifle will be used. We have not witnessed any
such use since 1945, but elimination offers the best way to prevent it.
This is not just my own personal view. It is the view adopted in 2000 and in 2010 by the States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. At their 2010 Review Conference, the Parties declared (and I quote) “the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.” (unquote)

I think the best way to see the great truth in this statement is to pose the question, what are the alternatives? Maintaining nuclear deterrence forever, even in a world with many nuclear-armed States? Will peace be achieved simply by reliance on the balance of power? Endlessly rising military budgets? Relying on non-proliferation alone to guarantee a solution to this challenge? Is the achievement of Nirvana—or total global peace and the resolution of all conflicts in our human family—a prerequisite for the achievement of this goal?

I am certainly not convinced that these are the solutions, and I am sure that you in this audience here today would also reject such arguments.

We all understand how declaring peace as a prerequisite for disarmament is a recipe for deferring indefinitely the achievement of either goal.

We understand that such a view ignores entirely the contributions that progress in disarmament makes in building peace and security among nations—by reducing mistrust; by saving vast resources for use in social and economic development; and by ensuring that future generations will live in safety and prosperity.

This is why Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called global nuclear disarmament, in his words, “a global public good of the highest order”—and why it is one of the most important goals of world citizens everywhere. This is why this issue has remained a priority at the United Nations throughout its existence.

And here in Japan, it has remained a priority because you recognize that this global interest is also your own national interest. You know that this is not a goal that will be easy to achieve. But you also know what can be accomplished by persistent efforts of your citizens by working together. I recall one of your proverbs, Nana korobi ya oki—or, “Fall down seven times, stand up eight.”

You, the students and faculty here at Kwansei Gakuin University, understand well the need to approach world citizenship not just as a noble goal but as an inspiration for concrete actions. This is seen in your university’s membership in a United Nations initiative called “Academic Impact” which seeks to build support from the world’s universities for multilateralism and global cooperation in meeting humanity’s common needs.
Some of you will acquire your own vision of world citizenship from your own families, from your religious convictions, from your friends, or from the groups or associations to which you belong.

Yet wherever these views may have originated, universities and other institutions of higher education also have an overwhelmingly important role to play in promoting this world citizenship.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon made a similar point last month in a speech delivered at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, saying “Education can help the world to build a global culture of peace that rejects all weapons of mass destruction as illegitimate and immoral.”

Universities can help this cause by offering courses dealing with many of the practical challenges of achieving disarmament and non-proliferation goals. They can teach students not just to identify worthy causes to pursue, but to think through the specific actions needed to achieve them. Universities exist not to instruct students what to think, but how to think, and to understand the perils of choosing not to think.

In the end, though, a person must decide for himself or herself whether to embrace the values and responsibilities of world citizenship.

Before making that choice, however, I hope each person will recall the advice of India’s great leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who once said “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

I cannot think of more appropriate words for concluding my own remarks today, as I congratulate the members of this audience who have already made that choice, and encourage you all to persist in your efforts to practice world citizenship in your personal and professional lives.

This is the spirit that will take us to a world free of nuclear weapons and that will enable us to meet other common needs of humanity. Please accept my best wishes as you rise to the many challenges that lie ahead—and rest assured, you will have many partners at the United Nations who will welcome working with you.