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Democracy, Disarmament, and the Rule of Law

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2010 World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs

Hiroshima, Japan, 6 August 2010

I welcome very much this opportunity to address the 2010 World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. I am especially pleased to do so on the day that the UN Secretary-General has personally addressed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony.

This was the first time in UN history that a Secretary-General attended this solemn event-an action that symbolizes the solidarity of the entire world in commemorating those who died on 6 August 1945 here in Hiroshima, and those who have endured unimaginable hardships as hibakusha. Yet today is also a day for the entire world to reaffirm its common commitment to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free future.

The visits of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon both to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of course, are only the most recent examples of something very positive that is happening in this world. Humanity is awakening to the need to confront a very old challenge-one not just of talking about or wishing for, but of actually achieving global nuclear disarmament.

I say "old challenge" because efforts have been underway both by governments and civil society alike for sixty-five years to achieve nuclear disarmament. In some ways, it is the oldest goal of the United Nations, considering that it was included in the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in January 1946. Here in Japan, Gensuikyo has been working on this challenge since September 1955-the same year that former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold termed nuclear disarmament a "hardy perennial" at the United Nations. In fact, the goal of nuclear disarmament is as old as nuclear weapons themselves.

Yet I am encouraged not just by the age of this goal, but by the nature of the support it has earned throughout the world. Advocates have come from literally all parts of social and political life-from individual citizens, diverse public interest groups, professional societies, cities, local governments, civic associations, governors, national governments, to regional and international organizations.

Disarmament is a goal that has united East and West, North and South. It is supported by the world's splendidly rich variety of cultures, races, and religions. It is an issue that unites men and women, the rich and poor, and the old and young. Supporters of nuclear disarmament represent a lot more than an association of like-minded citizens. No, the bonds between us are much closer than this.

Together, we form a kind of family or community of shared interests, values, commitments, and resolve. The only force that is more formidable than nuclear weapons is the solidarity of the world's people when they united behind a common cause, and nuclear disarmament is one of the greatest and most honourable of them all.

Now, we all know that nuclear disarmament is a very complicated subject. There are difficult technical questions to resolve. People fear nuclear weapons, yet many also fear the risks and uncertainties of getting rid of them. What if disarmament commitments are broken? What if cheating occurs? What if disarmament is not implemented universally?

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It is easy to pose such questions, though quite unfortunate that other types of questions are seldom posed about the alternatives to disarmament. Too often, we worry about the possible risks of disarmament, yet forget about the actual risks of failing to disarm-the risks from our current approaches to security.

You are all familiar with these unacceptable alternatives to disarmament: endlessly increasing military expenditures as social and economic needs remain under-funded; the threat of military pre-emption; the endless pursuit of a perfect missile defence; the belief that non-proliferation and counter-terrorist efforts alone will suffice to deal with global nuclear threats; and the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which has now spread to nine countries.

So I wish today to thank all of you here today who have quite justifiably drawn attention to these dangers, while emphasizing the genuine security benefits from achieving nuclear disarmament.

Not far from here lies the Aioi Bridge, the intended target of the bombing on 6 August 1945. The citizens of Hiroshima, aided by their supporters in Japan and throughout the world, have since constructed a new type of bridge-one leading to a global society of nuclear-weapon-free states. Yet to cross this bridge, there are tolls to pay.

We must recognize that any use of nuclear weapons would violate international humanitarian law. We must admit that if use is illegal, what can possibly justify the possession and threat of use of such weapons? If it is legally and morally acceptable for some states to have-and even to use such weapons-on what grounds can such states deny the right of others to acquire them? And if this happens, would the world be safer as a result? Clearly, our goal must not be fewer nuclear wars, or merely to reduce the risk that such weapons will be used, or just to keep additional states from acquiring them. No, we must instead eliminate double standards and pursue a universal goal of elimination. This is the only truly sustainable course to pursue, the only one that stands genuine peace and security for all.

Like you, I view nuclear weapons as dangerous wherever they may they be. We must oppose their proliferation not because of who may acquire them, but because of the very nature of the weapons themselves. We must replace the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence with efforts to construct a solid foundation of common security in a nuclear-weapon-free world-a future where security is maintained by non-nuclear means, where our governments place a greater emphasis on meeting social and economic needs, and where status and prestige are reserved for those who serve the people, not who develop weapons that threaten to destroy them.

This great bridge I have mentioned also connects knowledge with action. We must redouble our efforts to bring the histories of the hibakusha into the world's schools-and translating their testimonies into the world's major languages would be a good place to start, as the Secretary-General has recommended. Who can better teach the world about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war than the hibakusha? Through education, we must also show all people how disarmament strengthens security and promotes development.

We also need to engage all organized groups in society, for all benefit from disarmament. This is why I welcome the leadership shown by the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with their Mayors for Peace campaign. The world's parliaments are also raising their voices, as have local governments. This is an enormously significant development, one to be welcomed by the entire world community.

We must encourage states with nuclear weapons to commence negotiations to eliminate such weapons by law, as the Secretary-General proposed in 2008. I believe that we must also encourage them to declare their intention to achieve this within an agreed period of time-a goal long endorsed by the Non-Aligned Movement.

I know that this issue of "timelines" has proven controversial-it has been a theme voiced in the review conferences of

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the NPT for decades.

Mayors for Peace has proposed that 2020 should be the agreed goal. We should keep in mind that 2020 is 75 years after the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 61 years after the General Assembly first placed "general and complete disarmament" on its agenda, and a half century after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force, which required its parties to enter into good faith negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

If 2020 is somehow "premature", then this only begs the question: when should the world expect for nuclear disarmament to be achieved?

Now, I of course understand why the states with nuclear weapons have been reluctant to enter a binding legal obligation to eliminating their weapons by a specific date, given the uncertainties that may lie ahead. But I do believe that the world expects that these states would at least indicate a willingness to seek to achieve this goal by an agreed year-even if only in a non-binding political declaration. There is no risk or shame in declaring one's commitment to "seek to achieve" nuclear disarmament by a given year, and some significant benefit in signalling to the world that disarmament is finally being taken seriously, both in word and in deed.

An agreed date would assist in the domestic planning process for achieving nuclear disarmament. I believe that official planning to achieve nuclear disarmament must be a near-term priority of states that possess such weapons-not itself a long-term goal.

I am concerned that the failure to agree on a time-bound commitment to disarmament will lead, predictably, to a parallel reluctance of states to adopt more intrusive commitments to nuclear non-proliferation. If nuclear disarmament is approached simply as an "ultimate goal", then no one should be surprised if compliance with non-proliferation commitments will one day also be viewed as only an ultimate goal. To argue this point is only to invoke an unsustainable double standard.

We need not face this predicament. We should instead get to work in achieving concrete progress nuclear disarmament, following the sensible course recommended in October 2008 in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament. One key feature of that proposal was an emphasis on the need to extend the "rule law" into the field of disarmament. He proposed to do this by encouraging negotiations to begin on a nuclear weapons convention or a framework of separate, mutually-reinforcing instruments. He called for entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which Japan has worked so hard to promote over many years, as well as the start of negotiations on a fissile material treaty. He has urged the nuclear-weapon states to ratify all the protocols of treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, in order to assure states in those zones that they will not be subject to the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

And as we bring the "rule of law" to disarmament, so too must we bring democracy to disarmament. One requirement for informed public participation in disarmament is the ready availability of information about what states are doing to comply with their disarmament commitments.

Last May, the NPT Review Conference mandated the Secretary-General to establish a repository of information about such activities, which I believe will help both in informing the public and in establishing a basis for public accountability. This might well offer a foundation for the eventual creation of a comprehensive, global nuclear disarmament database, including details about the size of arsenals of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems, as well as data on the status of weapon-usable fissionable materials.

As public interest continues to grow in disarmament, so too will the demand for additional funding for groups in civil

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society who are working to advance this goal. Non-proliferation and counter-terrorism are clearly important goals, yet I believe that nothing would help more in addressing these challenges that significant progress in achieving nuclear disarmament. In short, is it not just nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism that threaten us today-these are all only reflections of a graver threat, the threat of the continued existence of nuclear weapons. If we solve that problem, only then can we hope to solve the rest.

So I will now conclude by reassuring everybody here today that while the eyes of the world are on Hiroshima every sixth of August, the hearts of the world are with you always. I am proud to join you on this journey to a nuclear-weapon-free world. It is a righteous cause and our shared responsibility to past victims and future generations. The time has come to move forward. Come, let us cross this great bridge together.

Sergio Duarte

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