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Workshop II: For a nuclear weapon-free peaceful Asia

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RATIFYING THE TPNW: The Philippine Perspective

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First of all, let me rejoice with the Hibakusha, the Japanese peace, and anti-nuclear movements for the historic Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which is now in force by the United Nations. Last Feb. 1, 2021, the Philippine Senate completed the constitutional process of ratifying the TPNW, thus, making our country the 53rd state to officially ratify the historic treaty.

Indeed, this is a significant step towards global peace and security.

My heart, mind and soul has always been one with peace advocates. Since 1987, my country the Philippines which toppled the Marcos dictatorship through people's power, also mobilized that people's power to prohibit in our Constitution, nuclear weapons on any part of Philippine territory. We are a country that is not only free officially, from nuclear weapons, but we are also proud to be free from any operational nuclear power plants.

While nine nuclear weapons states still hold the world captive to the threat of nuclear war, they have lost moral ground to most of the world – the 122 countries which have committed themselves to outlawing the production, transport and use of nuclear weapons. On our part, here in Southeast Asia, all the ten members of the ASEAN signed the Southeast Asia-Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEA-NWFZT) on Dec. 15, 1995 in Bangkok, entering into force on March 28, 1997. Thus, it is also called the Bangkok Treaty.

The NWFZT is considered a model for regional de-nuclearization. The treaty covers not just state territory but also Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and continental shelves. It prohibits the dumping or discharge of radioactive material or nuclear waste. In many ways, the SEA-NWFZT was inspired by the Philippines' prohibition of nuclear weapons under the 1987 Constitution, drafted and ratified after the 1986 People Power Revolution. At that time, the only other country with a nuclear weapons-free provision in its national constitution was Palau, in the South Pacific. It was not a coincidence that on Dec. 12, 1987, during an ASEAN meeting in Manila, that the ASEAN declaration to establish the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Free Zone was first made. The first SEA-NWFZ Treaty Review Conference also took place in Manila in June, 2007.

There are a range of issues that must be accounted for in the historic TPNW of course, a

challenge in the continuing face of the nuclear threat. It must be said that the TPNW is compatible with our country's commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Philippine Senate official ratification of the TPNW last Feb. 1, 2021 completed a constitutional process that seals our international commitment to world peace and security. Our people in my country are challenged to enforce our nuclear free constitution by abrogating the US-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). On the other hand, the 10 member countries in ASEAN are challenged to effectively enforce the 1995 Southeast Asian Weapons Free Zone Treaty. We must work for the universal and complete support for the TPNW. We must work to bring the nine nuclear weapons states to the realization that these weapons threaten our very existence as a planet.

Some have raised concerns that ratifying the TPNW would interfere with our country's relations with nuclear weapons states. Not true. But, will the world not be a better place if it were safe from a radioactive apocalypse caused either by human miscalculation, terrorism, or by computer errors, and where nations waged peace instead of war?

Today, more than ever, all nations have a responsibility to pursue nuclear disarmament. The 122 non-nuclear states have initiated a historic action aimed at declaring nuclear weapons as illegal under international law, even if those nine states possessing such weapons refuse to join. While the TPNW would not necessarily achieve the abandonment of all weapons held by nuclear weapons states, it would clearly uphold the right of non-nuclear weapons states to protect their own populations and the safety and survival of Mother Earth. We have on our side the overwhelming support of the citizens of our planet earth.

People who change the world are those who have a vision. This isn't easy, or simple. But it is just. The TPNW is consistent with many countries' ban against chemical and biological weapons, landmines, with the Southeast Asia-Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty, with our commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the role that our countries have played for world peace since the United Nations was organized. Each country should now focus on eradicating poverty and on improving the livelihoods of their people. International relations can now shift to common global concerns for cooperation: completing the abolition of nuclear weapons, climate change, pandemics, to name a few.

Today, the international community, including the NGOs and peoples' movements is happy at the TPNW which is now in force. This is a historic moment, a bold step towards world peace and nuclear disarmament for which the global peace movement has long struggled for during, and after the Cold War. But completing and enforcing it will still be a challenge. We encourage the international nuclear abolition campaigners to stay active and engaged to ensure success. For if we can finally abolish nuclear weapons, the world will certainly be a better place.

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