



22 July 2014

MESSAGE TO THE 2014 WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST ATOMIC AND HYDROGEN BOMBS

Next year will mark the seventieth commemoration of the first and hitherto only nuclear weapon attack, when the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fell victim to the devastation caused by the most inhuman and indiscriminate weapon ever to be developed – a date that lives in infamy as the world continues to face the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.

While these weapons have fortunately not been used in combat ever since, their existence, and the resultant risk of their accidental or deliberate use, constitute a continued threat to humanity. Of particular concern is the reversal of solemn decisions and undertakings made in the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) towards the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. While welcome progress has been made towards the reduction of the number of strategically deployed nuclear weapons, we are alarmed by the role envisaged for nuclear weapons in military doctrines, the modernisation of existing stockpiles and the development of new types of nuclear weapons, all of which increase the chance of their use.

We are equally concerned about justifications for the continued retention of nuclear weapons, which may contribute to their further vertical and horizontal proliferation. No cause could ever justify, under any circumstances, the use or threat of use of weapons of mass destruction. Any use of such weapons would be a contravention of international law, including International Humanitarian Law.

The renewed focus of the international community on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is therefore a welcome development. It serves as a necessary reminder of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences associated with a nuclear weapon detonation and the urgent need for progress towards the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.

As the only victims of a nuclear weapon attack, Japan and the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in particular, have a special role in efforts towards eradicating this threat.

As the only country to have developed and then voluntarily destroyed its own nuclear weapons programme, South Africa also occupies a unique position. We understand how policies that emphasise co-operation over conflict and the peaceful resolution of disputes over armed intervention can strengthen national security. We furthermore understand the impact of the development and maintenance of nuclear weapons in diverting much needed public resources from basic developmental needs to the detriment of the poor and the marginalised.

Today there are only a few survivors of the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – those that have first-hand experience of the impact of these weapons. We will thus need to focus attention on their knowledge in an effort to ensure that the world never again experiences the devastation and the medium – and long-term consequences of the use of nuclear weapons on people and the environment. It is with this in mind that I wish you a successful Conference that will contribute towards the achievement of a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons.

I thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Zuma', written over a circular stamp or seal.

Mr Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma
President of the Republic of South Africa