

2020 World Conference against A and H Bombs (online)
International Meeting
Session II (August 2)

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Now in Asia, US-China confrontation has raised military tension. China is continuing hegemonistic maritime activities claiming sovereignty over the South China Sea as well as the East China Sea. The US Trump administration is increasing its military responses to China, conducting military exercises with nuclear-powered aircraft carriers deployed. In times of the coronavirus crisis, such war games should be stopped immediately. I would strongly urge both the US and China to seek a peaceful resolution based on international law, instead of resorting to armed conflict or nuclear weapons.

This confrontation between the US and China demonstrates that Asia is full of risks of conflict and nuclear weapons. Northeast Asia, where Japan is located, has nuclear hot spots. China and North Korea, both of which have nuclear weapons, are confronted by the Japan-US and the US-South Korea military alliances. The present US-China rivalry over regional hegemony and their intensifying confrontation pose higher risks of war.

In this situation, achievement of a nuclear-free peaceful Northeast Asia is an urgent task. Japan and our movement have a critically important role to play on this issue. What should the Japanese government and our movement do then?

In July 2017, the international community adopted a historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). That was exactly when tensions between the US and North Korea were at their peak, with both governments openly saying that they would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons. With the adoption of the Treaty, the world steered toward saving humanity from the threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

But Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not hesitate to declare that he would not support or sign or ratify the TPNW, even in the presence of the Hibakusha. Behind this attitude is Japan's deep dependence on the US "nuclear umbrella". At the Japan-US extended Deterrence Dialogue, Japan has even asked for a guarantee that the US would use nuclear weapons. Humanity and the Earth can be annihilated by any nuclear-weapon explosion. How can anyone think that nuclear weapons can defend Japan and its people? The path Japan should take, as the only A-bombed country, is to leave the "nuclear umbrella" and join the TPNW.

Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of a peace system is the key to achieving a nuclear-free peaceful Northeast Asia. But the Japanese government has been devoted to putting pressure on North Korea and has demonstrated its inability to take any initiatives for a peaceful resolution. On the contrary, it has been using the threat of North Korea and China to justify

its reliance on the US “nuclear umbrella”. Strengthening its military alliance with the US, even aiming to revise the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, Japan is vigorously pushing forward towards becoming a war-fighting country, in concert with the US.

Japan is turning out to be a US forward deployment base to counter North Korea and China. The government planned to deploy the Aegis Ashore land-based missile defense system capable of intercepting North Korean missiles. The US and Japan are forcefully promoting the construction of a new base in Henoko, Okinawa, to which it is assumed nuclear weapons will be brought. In this context, it is obviously unconvincing for Japan to press North Korea and China to abandon their nuclear arsenals.

In order to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, North and South Korea and other parties involved in this issue should implement the agreements of the Panmunjom Declaration and other deals without fail. Japan is called upon to implement what was agreed in the 2002 Japan-Pyongyang Declaration, including the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries and contribution to peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

Reflecting on the past history of Japan’s annexation of the Korean Peninsula and its war of aggression against Asian nations, what Japan should do is shift its policies in the direction of nuclear elimination and peace, in accordance with the war-renouncing Constitution and its national policy of the Three Non-nuclear Principles—not to possess, not to produce and not to bring nuclear weapons into Japan’s territory. Japan should also act as a country of Asia by stopping its subservience to the US and its hostility towards its Asian neighbors.

Seventy-five years since the atomic bombing is also 75 years since the end of World War II. The historical issues, such as those of the Korean Hibakusha and Korean wartime laborers forced to work in Japan, remain unsettled. Their agony is not healed even now. It is impossible for the Japanese government to avoid the settlement of its past war of aggression and colonization, including an apology and compensation.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korea’s Chairman Kim Jong Un together crossed the border during an inter-Korean summit, and US President Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un met for summits. They were historic scenes. We witnessed that governments and their leaders can bring about dramatic change if they make a decision and take action. Changing politics is really important. We must not forget, however, that the government can be moved only by public opinion and actions.

We are confident that we can change Japanese politics, because people’s cooperation, centering on the international signature campaign in support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha, is laying siege to the Japanese government, as Gensuikyo’s Secretary General Yasui mentioned in his statement. A public opinion poll shows that more than 65 percent of the respondents say the government should

join the TPNW. The government was forced to withdraw its plan to deploy Aegis Ashore, sending shock waves to the US government. In the Okinawa prefectural assembly election in June, the opposition forces to the new US base construction won an overwhelming victory.

For achieving a nuclear-free Asia and world, together with the Hibakusha our movement in Japan, the only atom-bombed country, should continue to send the message that humankind cannot coexist with nuclear weapons. I think that's our role. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, there is a growing call that priority should be given to such issues as climate change, health care, and welfare services, which are critical for protecting people's lives and safety. This can serve as a spur to further develop our movement. In spite of the fact that many people are economically affected by the coronavirus pandemic, the Japanese government refuses to cut the defense budget, which has reached a record high, and continues the bulk buying of US arms. We are determined to drive the government into a corner on this point too.

Finally, I want to stress that cooperation between Japanese and South Korean citizens is indispensable for the realization of a peaceful Northeast Asia free of nuclear weapons, because Japan and South Korea are the only countries in Asia that oppose the TPNW and the two countries rely on the US "nuclear umbrella". Last year, Japanese and South Korean civil society cosponsored an international forum for nuclear elimination and peace. Participants agreed to work together toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of a peace system, withdrawal from the US nuclear umbrella and military alliances, the promotion of the TPNW, and the resolution of the historical problems between the two countries. I am confident that with such cooperation, we can change politics and achieve a peaceful Northeast Asia without nuclear weapons.