

**For a Nuclear Weapon-free, Peaceful and Just World:
Now is the time for civil societies to play their roles**

Hiroshi Taka
Representative Director, Japan Council against A & H Bombs

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. It is 76 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak alongside those who have played active roles in bringing positive changes in Asia recently.

As one of the leaders of the campaign against atomic and hydrogen bombs in Japan, I would like to join you in discussing the problems we face today and the role that the Japanese movement should play.

Conflicts should be settled in line with the UN Charter and international law

We believe, as many of you do, that the world is facing both a crisis and an opportunity.

The crisis is one that I shared with you. I noted in January this year that the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists kept the hands of the Doomsday Clock at 100 seconds to midnight. I agreed with their reasoning that governments and international organizations are unprepared for the threats posed by nuclear weapons and the climate crisis and for other existential threats.

Governments, especially those of the nuclear powers and their allies, have kept nuclear weapons, building up their arsenals, and engaging in repeated confrontations and conflicts, all for the "security" of their nationals. But when the world is confronted with existential threats to humanity, it becomes clear that such "security" is of no use at all.

In the "Organizers' Statement" for the 2021 World Conference, released on August 2, we strongly warned that the nuclear powers, in the midst of confrontation and standoff, continue to stockpile and deploy 13,000 nuclear weapons, with 2,000 warheads ready to launch on warning, and they are still developing, modernizing, building up and deploying new nuclear weapons on the grounds of their own "security".

In the background, of course, are the territorial disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea, and the conflict between the US and China over global hegemony. However, no matter where the cause or history of the conflict lies, it is already an established rule in the UN Charter and international law that international disputes should be resolved by peaceful means and that threats of force or the use of force should be avoided.

We call for an end to war games that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons. We demand that countries strictly refrain from the use of force, including attempts to change by force the status quo in territorial disputes, and that they strictly adhere to the UN Charter and international law.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - taking advantage of the opportunity

The world is now facing a crisis as well as a great opportunity. The importance of seizing and taking advantage of the current opportunity cannot be overemphasized.

The nuclear powers believe that if they boycott the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), it will have no effect; that they alone have the privilege of keeping the world safe with nuclear weapons, and that they can keep that privilege for the "foreseeable future".

However, this assumption overlooks the fact that the TPNW is a historic choice for humanity, as it concerns the survival of civilization and of the human race itself.

In the 1950s, after the long military occupation of Japan by the U.S., at the time when atomic bombs were being replaced by hydrogen bombs, we started this movement as a truly national struggle. It was 1954, in the wake of the damage caused by the U.S. hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll. The number of signatures collected for the ban on atomic and hydrogen bombs reached 32 million, more than half of the total number of voters at the time. Most of the assemblies, from the National Diet to municipal assemblies, passed resolutions to ban atomic and hydrogen bombs. The first World Conference against A and H Bombs was held in 1955 on the basis of this growing support from the public.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the anti-nuclear peace movement, triggered by the deployment of theater missiles in Europe, swept over European cities with hundreds of thousands of people coming out in protest, and, in 1982, one million people rallied in New York on the occasion of the Second UN Special Session on Disarmament,

demanding the abolition of nuclear weapons. The subsequent statement by President Reagan in the U.S. Congress calling for zero nuclear weapons and the summit meeting between the leaders of the U.S. and Russia on the abolition of nuclear weapons would not have been possible without these people's struggles.

In 2002, in response to the Bush administration's move to attack Iraq under the pretext of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, people took action in major cities all over the world. The overwhelming majority of governments joined them and even the Security Council called for a peaceful solution. At the 2005 NPT Review Conference, calling themselves the "second superpower," people demanded the immediate abolition of nuclear weapons. It was this power of the people which brought down the governments in most of the countries that joined or were complicit in the attack on Iraq and which produced the agreement "to achieve the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

The "Statement on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons" and the subsequent three international conferences on the same theme represented the so-called "humanitarian approach" to the abolition of nuclear weapons and were directly instrumental in achieving the TPNW. The humanitarian approach was successful in that it reframed the issue of nuclear weapons as a matter of human security. Until then they had been discussed as a matter of national security. I believe that this is a critically important perspective for both governments and civil society movements.

Even in the midst of the current confrontations and tensions, the major nuclear powers are making united statements at the United Nations to protect their nuclear prerogatives and oppose the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It is very important to remind the leaders of the nuclear powers of their own pledges to abolish nuclear weapons, to call on them to give serious consideration to the TPNW, and to demand a change in course from extinction by nuclear weapons to security through the abolition of nuclear weapons. The deliberations at the First Committee of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in October this year, the NPT Review Conference in January next year, and the subsequent Meeting of the States Parties to the TPNW are all important opportunities to initiate such actions.

Governments may not listen to us overnight. But people now realize that the overwhelming majority of people in nuclear-armed and nuclear-dependent countries now support the TPNW, and that this is where the real security lies. It is time to prepare

for the peoples' voices for the abolition of nuclear weapons to become the first "super power" instead of the "second".

Determination of the movement of A-bombed Japan

As we prepared for this year's World Conference, there was one more thing that we were determined to do. Just as the anti-A and H bomb movement did in the 1950s, now that the TPNW has come into effect, we must unite the will of the Japanese people to make Japan join the TPNW and lead the world in nuclear abolition.

Of course, the current ruling parties in Japan cannot be expected to do that. To realize this goal, it is necessary to make joining the TPNW a common policy among the opposition parties, to create cooperation among a broad range of civil society to support this policy, and to build national opinion in favor of leaving the nuclear umbrella and joining the TPNW.

It is not an easy task, but it is an attainable goal, and one that must be accomplished for the sake of peace and security. There is also a bright outlook. We have had direct conversations with the leaders of the opposition parties. Not all of the opposition parties are in favor of joining the treaty. Along with those who are in favor of the treaty, there are also parties that are undecided and leaders who believe that the "nuclear umbrella" is still necessary. However, there are many members of the Diet who believe that the issue should be debated in national politics, and not a few of them are willing to work together to join the ban treaty. This dialogue and cooperation are important.

There are both hopes and difficulties in the collaboration among civil societies. The Civic Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism, which is proposing a common policy for the opposition parties to cooperate on, has incorporated "prompt ratification of the TPNW" into its proposal. Expanding the support of public opinion is the most important foundation for us to build on. The signature campaign urging Japan to join the TPNW is ongoing in every prefecture in Japan. More than one-third of all local assemblies have passed resolutions calling on the Japanese government to join the treaty. On August 1, the day before the World Conference opened, a public opinion poll released by newspapers showed that 71% of the respondents called for Japan to join the TPNW and more than 85% called for Japan to participate in the First Meeting of the States Parties.

After the World Conference, a general election is scheduled this autumn. In

preparation for that election, we will step up our activities to create an overwhelming ground swell of public opinion calling for Japan's accession to the treaty, beyond all differences in ideology, beliefs, and political affiliation. It would be a great support to us if you could take action in your countries directed at your own governments and the governments of nuclear-armed states in response to our efforts.

For solidarity in Asia

Last but not least, solidarity in Asia is an important issue.

In East Asia, there are already ten ASEAN countries that constitute a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Southeast Asia. Mongolia has established the status of a single state nuclear-free zone, and there are campaigns in South Korea for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In this context, if Japan leaves the nuclear umbrella and chooses to join the TPNW, it will create new conditions for peace and security both for Japan and for Asia.

I believe that this will create the conditions in Japan's relationship with Asian countries for Japan to face up to its past history without any falsehood and to talk frankly and constructively to resolve issues of conflict.

To this end, we will continue to develop our exchanges with the people of Asian countries. We sent an invitation to the Chinese delegation this year as well, although they were unable to come.

I would like to conclude by expressing my gratitude to all of you from Asian countries for your participation in the World Conference and hope that this exchange of views today will be meaningful for the development of our mutual understanding and joint actions.