

Corazon Valdez Fabros

Nuclear-Free Philippines Coalition

I would like to express appreciation to the Organizing Committee of the 2021 World Conference, particularly Gensuikyo, for inviting me to join today's Workshop on Nuclear-Free and Peaceful Asia and the Role of People's Movements. It is an honor and a privilege to share this virtual platform with many friends and other movement leaders and with our Japanese friends Ohayo Gozaimas!

This is the second time we are holding these commemorative events in the midst of the pandemic. The challenges we face are many and complex, at times overwhelming, yet we are truly present in our struggles and resistance. We are learning lessons and skills we never expected we can muster the energy and courage to pursue. The Hibakusha, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who we honor as our inspiring compass in holding the conference every year, continues to inspire us with their determination to ensure that Hiroshima and Nagasaki will not happen again. I am also happy that more and more young peace movement leaders are taking on more active roles in organizing and making our gatherings possible.

Earlier speakers at the International Meeting and workshops, including Hiroshi Taka-san's lecture today have clearly laid out the situation of un-peace, insecurity, injustice, inequality, conflicts and tensions in the world today. The Asia Pacific, has been for a long time a Theater of War, the American Lake, and sadly, continues to be so, where communities suffer the impacts of colonialism, militarism and patriarchy and the rise of fascist and authoritarian regimes.

In the Philippines, during the commemoration of 75th Anniversary of the US-Philippine diplomatic relations, and the 70th year of the Mutual Defense Treaty, it is

significant to understand the nature of that alliance with the presence of US Defense Secretary Austin and the Philippine Defense Secretary Lorenzana at the helm of the commemoration, highlighted by the Philippine President's retraction of the termination letter for the Visiting Forces Agreement. putting back on track and highlighting "the significance of the bilateral **defense** relations between the Philippines and the US in light of new and emerging challenges that confront our nation." This therefore fully restores the Visiting Forces Agreement.

At the top of the US agenda, according to Austin, was finding ways to enhance and reinvigorate the alliance and the Mutual Defense Treaty. These include maritime Cooperation, support to further modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and investments that will help the Philippines navigate the region's complex security environment. The specifics and contours of these general statements remains to be seen. Their discussion on counterterrorist cooperation as a strong area of common support is a cause of concern in light of the Philippine's policy of red-tagging and clamping down on activities critical of its authoritarian policies and governance. Already an Anti-Terror Law is being enforced despite the pending 37 petitions before the Supreme Court challenging its constitutionality. Never before have I seen such broad range of opposition and legal challenge. in our many years as peace, justice and human rights advocates. Duterte's human rights record across sectors (including lawyers and media) puts to shame the records of previous regimes. I am deeply ashamed of the subservient posture and foreign policy of this government towards foreign powers particularly towards the United States and China.

Note that the US has supported the counter-insurgency effort of the Philippine government in Mindanao since 2000. Closely related to this is US commitment of its

support to the newly named operation in the Indo-Pacific, **Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines**.

With the VFA in place, the U.S. can conduct more than 300 bilateral engagements every year with the Philippine Armed Forces, from expert exchanges to ship visits to component exercises and major training exercises like Balikatan, including Philippines’ participation in major military exercises like Talisman Sabre and RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) in the name of interoperability and preparations for war.

In his speech at the International Meeting, Joseph Gerson expounded on the current state of affairs and direction of the US-China relations, with the U.S. forging a national consensus that “China is an existential threat to freedom and democracy; therefore the U.S. must aggressively defend democracy– militarily, diplomatically, technologically, and otherwise.” And warned about the “consequences of the tensions between rising and declining powers that in the past have climaxed in catastrophic wars.”

China’s rise as economic and military power, its aggressive military actions in the West Philippine Sea is an urgent concern in Southeast Asia and the rest of Asia and the Pacific. This situation challenges the unity and cooperation among the ASEAN that brings to the fore the need for the serious implementation of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty.

As we meet today, the US naval and amphibious exercise called **Large Scale Exercise 2021 (LSE2021)**, the largest of its kind in 40 years is underway until August 16, reminds us of similar Cold War exercises in 1980s demonstrating resolve and new capabilities. Involving units spanning 17 different time zones, “LSE2021 potentially puts adversaries on notice that the U.S. can simultaneously address

challenges in the Black Sea, eastern Mediterranean Sea, South China Sea and East China Sea -- shutting down efforts to spread American military forces thin" (James R. Holmes, the J.C. Wylie Chair of Maritime Strategy at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I).

It demonstrates that U.S. naval and Marine forces can deny adversaries control of the seas, which is especially crucial in the Western Pacific, where the U.S. hopes to prevent China from occupying Taiwan or seizing the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands.

About 36 ships, more than 50 virtual units, military, civilian contract personnel, 6 naval and Marine Corps component commands with five U.S. fleets and three Marine Expeditionary Forces are involved. I shiver at the thought of the dangers it poses to the people of this region and the mind-blowing amount of money, resources and manpower that is wasted in the name of preparations for war and the profits that exponentially make the war profiteers insatiably hunger for more.

What then is the role of the people's movements amidst these challenges?

We have started this year celebrating the long awaited coming into force of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons paving the way towards a nuclear free world.

For us in the Philippines, we will hold on to our determination and aspiration expressed in the Philippine Constitution that served as the legal basis for the Philippines ratification of the TPNW: "*THE PHILIPPINES, CONSISTENT WITH THE NATIONAL INTEREST, ADOPTS AND PURSUES A POLICY OF FREEDOM FROM NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN ITS TERRITORY.*" (DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND STATE POLICIES, Sec. 8, Article 2, 1987 Philippine Constitution.)

the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treat (1995); the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by the United Nations.

Our next step is to legislate a national and international treaty that bans nuclear power plants unless there is consent by the majority of the people thru a national referendum.

Allow me to lift lessons from struggles and resistance against dictatorship, U.S. Bases and the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant in the Philippines:

1. SOLID ORGANIZING at the national level and local communities.
2. Involve ALL SECTORS including students, teachers, local officials, church people, media, etc. for a broad, popular struggle.
3. Wage a CULTURAL STRUGGLE to SIMPLIFY and popularize our message through songs, plays, film, comics, etc.
4. Initiate LEGAL PROCEEDINGS in courts as well as initiate/lobby for LEGISLATIVE efforts to institutionalize victories. People Power!
5. Initiate campaigns locally and internationally against the financing and support of harmful nuclear energy technologies, weapons of war and mass destruction.
6. Activate world-wide networks for INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY against the global nuclear mafia, foreign military bases, military infrastructure, and the existence of autocratic and fascist regimes;
7. Creatively expose and critique the continuing rise of military spending and the weaponization of our laws, education, governance and social structures that only perpetuate injustice, violence and oppression;

8. POPULARIZE development alternatives that respect and uphold life, dignity and human rights that is manifested in the reduction of military spending, prioritizing the basic needs of people and the protection of the environment.

Finally, on behalf of the International Peace Bureau and the Asia Europe Peoples Forum, I express our commitment to support the campaigns for the implementation of the TPNW; the reduction of military spending; the opposition to foreign military bases, the Korea Peace Appeal Signature campaign and peace in the Korean Peninsula and the important work of formulating a common security policy that involves social movements and governments across sectors and regions.

No more Hibakusha! No to nuclear weapons! No to War! And yes to justice, to a life sustaining climate and to people's health and human rights!