

2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs - Hiroshima Day Rally

Session 1: Joint Efforts for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

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It is a great honor to be given this valuable opportunity to speak before you at the Hiroshima Day Rally of the 2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs.

In my engagement in the anti-personnel mine and anti-cluster bomb campaigns for over a quarter century, my study on nuclear disarmament in my student days became the starting point for all my disarmament work. In those days, in the midst of the “Cold War”, there were as many as 60,000 nuclear warheads. Notwithstanding the huge number of nuclear weapons at their disposal, the United States and the Soviet Union were still continuing their arms race.

Since the end of the “Cold War”, the United States and Russia have reduced the number in their nuclear arsenal. Yet with over 13,000 nuclear warheads still existing in the world, the situation remains fraught with fear that nuclear weapons could actually be used for a third time at any moment, despite the real danger that the world would be plunged into catastrophe.

At present, I am working to make a chronological record of the history of the Japanese peace movement. If we restrict ourselves to developments since World War II, it is safe to say that the nuclear abolition movement has been the main pillar of the whole Japanese peace movement. In addition to the tireless work of the Hibakusha and other people who support them, rallies and marches by national organizations, discussions and studies by researchers and experts, statements of warning by scientists, literary works, films and theater created by people of art and culture – all these wide-ranging activities in such a rich variety unseen in any other citizens' movement have piled up for over 70 years. Further, the nuclear abolition movement was among the first to serve as a global campaign addressing its appeal worldwide and calling for international solidarity.

Indeed, large numbers of people in Japan have continued to take action out of their heart-felt belief that coexistence with nuclear weapons is unacceptable and that nuclear weapons must be eliminated. This belief has not abated. According to a nationwide opinion poll conducted early last month (July this year), 71% answered that Japan should join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and 85% said that Japan should attend the first meeting of the parties to the TPNW as an observer.

Given the tenacious resistance of the superpowers, it will be no easy task to achieve a “world without nuclear weapons” by way of the TPNW. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to open a new horizon by multiplying our efforts.

Take COVID-19, for example, which has been assailing the world since early 2020. It has placed a heavy financial burden on every government to cover the medical and

hygiene costs and to make up for economic losses. In response, it has given rise to calls for cuts in military expenditure, including nuclear weapon-related spending. The number of financial institutions which, in response to pressure from civil society, have decided to disinvest from the nuclear weapon-related military industry is increasing. Regardless of the countries where they operate, both governments and enterprises must give more weight to “human security” to protect the lives and rights of people.

Mr. Thomas Hajnoczi, former Austrian disarmament ambassador who was deeply involved in the adoption of the TPNW, has pointed out that if the argument on nuclear issues is confined to the military experts and diplomats of nuclear powers, then the realistic perspective will be lost. That is because nuclear issues concern not only the national security of all countries, but also the very survival of the human race.” Mr. Hajnoczi is an ambassador who also made a great contribution to the formation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The development of the bans on anti-personnel mines, on cluster bombs, and now on nuclear weapons has been achieved by virtue of collaboration between global civil society movements and national governments who share the goal. This series of campaigns, now referred to as “humanitarian disarmament”, meaning the prioritization of the security and welfare of human beings over the security of states, is now gaining momentum and is beginning to move world politics.

The view that “humans and nuclear weapons cannot coexist” represents the desire of most Japanese, and is now becoming the shared understanding of the vast majority of the people around the world. It is a lesson of history that even small efforts by individuals, when added together, can develop into a motivating power that drives politics. Taking this lesson as a basis for my own action, I will keep thinking about what I can do. I thank you for listening.