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I feel grateful and honored to be given this opportunity to speak today.

Thank goodness that the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs exists. This is how I feel at this time. For, as Ambassador Kmentt said, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made the threat of nuclear warfare a real and present danger. And that is not all. The Japanese government is cynically trying to make use of this danger to bulldoze through increases in the military budget. The financing for this looks set to come from even more government bond issues.

The very idea of taking advantage of the horrific suffering of the Ukrainian people and using it as an excuse for an arms buildup is so bizarre and of such a low level that one cannot but be stunned. And the government is trying to achieve this by accumulating even more debt. It has treated the Bank of Japan as its subsidiary for money providing purposes and is stepping up to ensure such a status of the BOJ.

It was early June that the late Prime Minister Abe Shinzo professed that the BOJ was the government's subsidiary, which proved the long-standing attitude of the Japanese government. And Prime Minister Kishida, who actually hails from Hiroshima, is to host next year's G7 Summit in this city. Yet he refuses even to refer to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The purpose for existence of the government ought to be to serve the people. Its most essential mission is to relieve the vulnerable. To give a helping hand to people in distress should be the fundamental role, or the *raison d'être* of any government. However, successive LDP governments since Abe's time have ignored this mission and gone forth in the relentless pursuit of a growth strategy aimed at creating a large and strong economy. And this situation is getting worse and worse, both in Japan and internationally.

We will not turn a blind eye to this dire situation. We will never allow the use of nuclear weapons to happen. This powerful voice is about to spread from this World Conference against A and H Bombs to every nook and cranny of the globe. I am thankful for this voice and find it greatly reassuring.

Moreover this voice is being raised this year from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two victim cities of nuclear bombings. This voice has a particularly powerful force and can be likened to that "voice of one crying out in the wilderness" of Biblical renown.

As a Catholic, I draw a variety of inspiration from the Bible. That was really the case this time as well. That “voice in the wilderness” is the voice of the prophet. It is the voice that brings the message of God to people on earth. It is the voice that is addressed to those within from without. It is the voice that brings warning and encouragement to those trapped within walls – walls that make people blind to tense realities. This voice is the voice of all of you assembled for this year’s Conference. Yours is the modern day “voice of one crying out in the wilderness”. You are the modern-day prophets. Glory to you!