

**2023 World Conference against A and H Bombs
International Meeting -- Session 3**

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A nuclear weapon-free, peaceful and just world – Solidarity and actions of civil society

My name is Margaret Engel and I am the Student and Campaigns Coordinator at Peace Action New York State. It is an honor to stand before the attendees here in Hiroshima at the World Conference Against A and H Bombs, alongside this inspiring international group of peace advocates. I want to thank the World Conference Organizing Committee and Gensuikyo for organizing this conference year after year. They have worked tirelessly to provide a space for hibakusha to continue to tell their stories and for organizers of all ages, gender identities, ethnicities, and backgrounds to come together in the face of a militarized world stage. With everything happening in the world, it's so important and timely to be talking about the dangers of nuclear weapons— this month, we remember the 78th anniversary of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing, infecting, and displacing millions. Many of our community chapters during this time hold in-person and virtual commemorations in honor of the hibakusha as they call for a nuclear-free world in the wake of such a devastating moment in history. 78 years later, we still have not been liberated from the nuclear age, as nuclear weapons are stockpiled and brandished in times of political turmoil and used as a threatening currency on the global stage. It is crucial now more than ever to recognize our capacity for change as members of civil society. Together we must demand policies from our government bodies that do not simply reform the dangerous stockpiling activities of nuclear states such as the U.S., but lead us down the path of total nuclear abolition before it is too late.

I represent Peace Action New York State, the New York affiliate of Peace Action, the largest grassroots peace network in the United States. Our origins lie in the birth of the nuclear disarmament movement as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy in the 1950s (SANE for short). Powerful voices were utilized in American media to spread SANE's message about the importance of government regulation on nuclear weapons and early efforts in our movement led to the passing of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Peace Action's origins also lie in the nuclear Freeze movement of the 1980s, during which rallies, demonstrations, and meetings with representatives were held by a grassroots confederation of anti-nuclear groups

across America, calling on the US and Soviet Union to halt the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons. I am proud to stand here today, representing Peace Action New York State, and being able to share with you the accomplishments of my predecessors. But there is still so much more work to be done.

One of our greatest assets in our Peace Action community is our student organizing program. Our student organizers are passionate, resilient individuals who take action on campus and in their communities. Our 15 campus chapters host webinars with experts in their fields, participate in lobby meetings with their elected representatives, take to the streets in protests and rallies, and facilitate dialogue on campus surrounding a number of different peace and justice issues. Our students work on a range of peace and social justice issues, including climate change, racial justice, indigenous rights, and nuclear proliferation. We encourage student organizers to engage with their chapters in relevant peace discussions, ranging from nuclear policy in the U.S. to the war in Ukraine. One of our chapters this year organized a peace summit on their campus, where the student body and local peace advocates were able to meet and collaborate on future actions together. Although I often find it frustrating and unfair for older generations to call upon youth advocates to take on the responsibility of ensuring a safer, nuclear-free tomorrow without working to build intergenerational trust, I also think it is true that it is never too soon for students to start developing their skills in organizing and utilizing their talents to spark change in the community they live in. It is through these efforts that we can reach the future we envision of a nuclear-free, equitable world.

I bring up the historical achievements of Peace Action's campaigns in previous decades because there is still something to learn from the organizers of the past. People say that history repeats itself, often when they are speaking about the brutalities of war and the rise and fall of nationalism, authoritarianism, and other political threats. But the same saying can be applied to methodology when it comes to organizing for peace. Civil society, whether in Japan, the United States, or elsewhere, has the power to create change. In the US, Peace Action played a critical role in engaging the public to urge many potentially swing Senate voters to support the Iran Nuclear Deal in 2015. In 2017, Peace Action New York State was able to celebrate with community partners the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was made possible by the tireless efforts of hibakusha and other dedicated anti-nuclear civil society groups across the world, frustrated by the lack of progress or action from the nuclear-armed states. Grassroots organizations of all kinds have garnered support and funding through collaborative efforts. With this mutual support and the sharing of resources,

organizations like Peace Action have continued to lobby for concrete change in nuclear policy with our local representatives year after year. We have taken to the streets in Manhattan, Washington, D.C., and across the country demanding action from our government. We lift up the voices of our student organizers and encourage their passion for disarmament. We work together even in the face of uncompromising, destabilizing nuclear policy in the United States, such as a planned \$1.2 trillion for nuclear weapons over the next thirty years.

Despite the United States being a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, my country continues to pour money into nuclear weapons research and stockpiling. This year, the Department of Energy has spent over \$264 billion on plans for a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) carrying nuclear warheads. The longstanding myth of nuclear deterrence serving as a valid geopolitical tactic persists in U.S. foreign policy regardless of which party holds executive power, and Peace Action New York State continues to work on debunking this myth and making it clear that the only way we are safe from the threat of nuclear weapons is if we abolish them altogether.

Several bills have been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate over the last several years to help lessen the threat of nuclear war. Many of these bills call for a reallocation of funding from nuclear weapons assembly and maintenance towards combating another global threat: climate change. The Nuclear Weapons Abolition and Economic Conversion Act, also called “Warheads to Windmills”, is a bill that seeks to convert nuclear weapons industry resources and personnel to purposes relating to addressing the climate crisis. The Hastening Arms Limitation Talks Act, also known as HALT, seeks to increase critical nonproliferation measures to reduce nuclear risks at politically dangerous times. H.Res.77, also called the Back from the Brink resolution, is a bill that calls on the President to embrace the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and make nuclear disarmament the centerpiece of U.S. national security policy. It also calls on the United States to lead a global effort to move the world back from the nuclear brink and to prevent nuclear war. Grassroots organizations like Peace Action New York State have worked to lobby for nonproliferation bills each year. We continue to call for action from our representatives in signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Peace Action New York has also been busy this summer helping to promote and organize local actions. The Golden Rule, a peace boat which originally set sail to stop nuclear testing in the Pacific and was later restored by Veterans for Peace to continue on its anti-nuclear mission, has been sailing across Upstate New York in support of the TPNW. As Christopher Nolan’s new film *Oppenheimer* premieres,

community partners across the state have organized public discussions about the legacy of J. Robert Oppenheimer's work on the atomic bomb, and how we can work to prevent nuclear war today. The Move the Money Campaign is a coalition of 60 New York-based organizations that have worked for years on New York City Council legislation that would move significant funds away from the military budget in order to fund social services, and to hold in-depth public hearings on the basic human needs of City residents that are unmet because of government appropriations for the Pentagon. Since the Union of Concerned Scientists and Physicians for Social Responsibility came together to establish the Back from the Brink Campaign, the coalition has made great strides in spreading awareness about the threat of nuclear weapons stockpiling and encouraging real political change. It is these international joint actions that help us achieve our goals and ensure a brighter future for the next generation of activists.

The TPNW is a hallmark agreement that has seen tremendous success in reducing the global nuclear arsenal and garnering attention to the issue of disarmament around the world. With 92 signatories and 68 parties, the TPNW is the best, globally applicable prohibition of nuclear weapons of its time. According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, close to half of the world's countries will soon be counted as either parties or signatories. However, we can only gain traction with the TPNW if civil society continues to take action and keep the fight against nuclear weapons alive in their own countries. At the United Nations Headquarters in November, the states parties will meet for a second time to discuss global disarmament strategies and hear from and collaborate with members of civil society. Last year at the first meeting, the states-parties produced an ambitious 50-point action plan and several decisions designed to implement the 2017 agreement. It also adopted a political statement that aims, in part, to reinforce norms against nuclear weapons use and threat of use. It will be crucial to hold these leaders accountable for these decisions. Peace Action New York State is looking forward to meeting with other organizations during that time and working together in joint international action to improve our organizing strategies. Not only will the second meeting at the UN be a great opportunity for the states parties to meet, but it will also be great for peace activists to come together. It is so important to hear the voices and learn the names of our colleagues in this global community who share the same passion and drive for change. In New York, we can lift each other up, celebrate one another's successes, brainstorm ideas for the future, and collaborate on international projects. We have the power to bring an end to the nuclear age and create a safer, sustainable, and just future by working together. I sincerely hope to see many of you at the UN in the fall. Thank you very much.