

Opening Plenary, World Conference against A and H Bombs – Nagasaki

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I would like to thank the organisers of the World Conference against A and H bombs very much for the honor of inviting me again to speak to you on this very important occasion of commemorating the atomic bomb explosion in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. in August 1945.

I send my greetings to all the activists - young or old - who have gathered at this conference. Your work and your voices are crucially important. We will only achieve positive change on the existential issue of nuclear weapons if more people care about this that way you do.

I would like to send, in particular, my greetings and respect to the Hibakusha for their tireless efforts and commitment to warning humanity of the devastating impact of nuclear weapons through their own daunting experiences. These warnings, regrettably, are becoming ever more important and urgent.

Nuclear risks were on the rise long before the Russian invasion in Ukraine and the subsequent implicit and unmistakable nuclear threats issued by President Putin and other Russian officials.

These nuclear risks are fueled by heightened geopolitical competition, arms race dynamics, the decline of arms control and the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Nuclear risks are increasing, including through new technologies and corresponding vulnerabilities. There are several tense and conflictual contexts in Europe, Asia and the Middle East that have the potential for dangerous escalation to the use of nuclear weapons. In Japan, the disconcerting developments in North Korea will be of great concern as well as the rising geopolitical competition and tensions with China.

This already disconcerting state of affairs is dramatically compounded by Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and the potential for nuclear escalation of the war in Ukraine.

We also hear talk about the use of tactical nuclear weapons, as if this would somehow be "not so bad". The use of nuclear weapons risks being "normalized" and the taboo against

the use of nuclear weapons looks increasingly fragile.

Fittingly, the famous Doomsday Clock has now been set to an unprecedented 90 seconds before midnight, the closest to midnight since 1947, when the Doomsday Clock started to measure the risk of nuclear war.

This is indeed a very dangerous situation.

The majority of states that does not consider nuclear weapons to be legitimate watches in disbelief how geopolitics slides the world back into a perilous phase of high risk of nuclear conflict.

We are now at a fork in the road on the nuclear weapons issue. Either the conclusion that states will draw from this crisis is an even stronger emphasis on nuclear weapons and deterrence. This would likely take us down the path of more competition and tensions, new nuclear arms races, more proliferation pressure and further increasing global nuclear risks.

However, this moment of heightened nuclear dangers could also lead to an alternative conclusion. Namely, that this crisis and the current high risks of nuclear weapons use have brought into sharp focus the fragility of nuclear deterrence. That nuclear arms races much be avoided. That the situation in Ukraine is so much more dangerous because of nuclear weapons; that this increases concerns about the sustainability of the nuclear status quo and that that a paradigm shift on nuclear weapons is needed.

A critical re-assessment of the veracity of the arguments that underpin nuclear deterrence is necessary together with a weighing of these arguments against the empirical evidence on the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear deterrence is seen as the ultimate security guarantee. This belief is very deeply entrenched.

The problem in this is that in reality we lack the empirical evidence. Nuclear deterrence is a theory. It assumes and projects actions, intentions, consequences and expected outcomes.

We can't prove that nuclear deterrence has worked in the past or will work in the future, just as much as it cannot be proven that it has not worked in the past or will not do so in the future. Like any human belief system" nuclear deterrence depends on assumptions and carries within it the risk of overconfidence and a potential confirmation bias.

The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence is uncertain but we know for sure that nuclear

deterrence can fail - and if it fails, we have the evidence that it likely fails catastrophically and with global impact.

The whole world carries the risks of nuclear deterrence failing.

It brings high risks for the security of all other countries, whose populations could end up as collateral damage in much more severe ways than previously understood.

This raises profound legal, ethical, legitimacy and international and intergenerational justice questions.

It is certainly understandable that states feel insecure in the face of such irresponsible and aggressive behaviour as we see from Russia and the DPRK. But responding to such behavior with reliance on nuclear deterrence also compounds and perpetuates nuclear risks and, thus, also contributes to the continuation of an unacceptable high-risk status quo.

The belief in nuclear deterrence relies on the credible threat of the actual use of nuclear weapons. As long as states rely on nuclear deterrence, there cannot be a real or credible taboo against the use of nuclear weapons. Because nuclear deterrence is logically based on concrete plans and the intention of using these weapons of mass destruction and inflicting unthinkable suffering with potentially catastrophic global consequences. This very practice thus carries existential risks to all humanity; risks that the majority of States are no longer willing to accept. The fact that the reliance on nuclear deterrence may be based on the assumption that nuclear weapons will in the end not be used does not change this.

Are any nuclear threats responsible in light of what we know today about the humanitarian consequences and risks of these weapons? What in terms of humanitarian consequences can be considered as acceptable and, especially, for whom and based on what legitimation? And, what kind of security and security for whom are we talking about in such a context.

An approach based on *my nuclear threat is responsible while yours is irresponsible* is not convincing from this perspective.

The States parties to the TPNW, for their part, have done their share to re-enforce the nuclear taboo and to express their clear and unequivocal condemnation about any use or threat of use. In their joint declaration at the 1st MSP in Vienna in June 2022, they stated:

"We are alarmed and dismayed by threats to use nuclear weapons and increasingly strident

nuclear rhetoric. We stress that any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is a violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. We condemn unequivocally any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances."

This is the clearest and most unequivocal internationally agreed statement on this issue to date to solidify the nuclear taboo. It should be the reference point on the nuclear weapons issue for the international community in light of the precarious situation in which we find ourselves.

Let me close by asking the question how long can we continue to assume that nuclear deterrence will hold and nuclear weapons will not be used? We see Russian roulette being played at the moment. How can we be confident of this in the future, in tensions with China, with DPRK or between India and Pakistan or in a potential Middle East proliferation context?

Can it be considered as a *realist* approach to continue to bet on deterrence stability or is it in reality wishful thinking based on many assumptions and uncertainties and the risk of confirmation bias?

Trying to find a normative and political way out of the nuclear deterrence paradigm strikes me as a realist and prudent response to the empirical evidence on the consequences should the high-risk nuclear deterrence bet fail.

The TPNW codifies the delegitimation of nuclear weapons because of their unacceptable humanitarian impact and risks. This is based on serious evidence and is a way to help the international community to conceptualise a change in perspective on these weapons. Ultimately, no responsible state *should ever* find the use of this most indiscriminate and destructive weapon acceptable. The same must go for the threat of use.

The TPNW is not a silver bullet answer for future security challenges, but nuclear deterrence most definitely is no silver bullet either and certainly not a sustainable one. In these extremely dangerous times we need leadership and we need cooperation. The TPNW is a constructive and serious investment into international law and the common security of all. Irrespective of different legal views regarding nuclear weapons, all responsible states should engage constructively on the profound arguments and legitimate and global security concerns now expressed in the TPNW.

When most nuclear developments point in the opposite direction of nuclear disarmament and the leadership of nuclear-armed countries on this issue has all but disappeared, the TPNW is an indispensable and potentially consequential ray of hope against an otherwise very bleak backdrop of currently failing leadership on nuclear disarmament.

It is more important than ever that the voices and warnings of the hibakusha that have played such a crucial role in making the TPNW a reality are heard. They must inspire the next generation to push for the change in thinking that is necessary to move away from the ill-fated belief in nuclear weapons. I thank you for your support for the TPNW and hope that you will continue to promote this important new treaty to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

Thank you