

# **Opening Remarks**

**By**

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**The 18<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on Disarmament Issues in Yokohama**

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His Excellency Mr. Kono, the Speaker of the House of Representatives,

His Excellency Mr. Ito, the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs,

His Excellency, Ambassador Burian, the Chairman of the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee,

Mr. Nakada, the Honourable Mayor of Yokohama,

Honourable Mr. Akashi,

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to open this 18<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues, which is convening for the first time in the historic, maritime city of Yokohama. This is indeed a fitting location for such a conference – fitting, because of the city's long history as a centre of international commerce. Over the years, the citizens of Yokohama understand well how interdependent the peoples of the world have become, and can easily appreciate how the threats in one part of the world can endanger security elsewhere.

Since the opening of the first such conference in Kyoto in 1989, the strategic situation of the world has radically changed. The Soviet Union has collapsed and the Cold War finally ended, which substantially reduced fears of the world's darkest nightmare: a global nuclear war.

Yet today, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain and new threats of nuclear proliferation are looming larger, which reminds us again of the need for extensive international cooperation to address these grave and emerging questions facing the entire world. As these threats grow in gravity and wider geographic scope, we find that many of the old concepts that once provided a basis for security – including the doctrine of nuclear deterrence – seem increasingly out of step with the times.

Such concepts offer little in alleviating threats in today's world of terrorists who respect no rules and recognize no constraints in either their ends or their means. Nor are they appropriate in a world where the states with narrow national interests are not just seeking weapons of mass destruction, but threatening to use them, while others are developing new types of such weapons that will be easier to use, and without any clear concepts or philosophy to deal with current challenges.

Speaking at the University of Tokyo last May, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that the world now finds itself at a crossroads -- with one path leading to new progress in reducing and eliminating threats of nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism, and the other path taking us toward a world where these threats are rapidly growing. He warned that, in his words –

*The international community seems almost to be sleepwalking down the latter path – not by conscious choice, but rather through miscalculation, sterile debate and the paralysis of multilateral mechanisms for confidence-building and conflict-resolution.*

As a country long recognized throughout the world as a frontrunner in the cause of disarmament, Japan should heed this warning and continue to lead the way in exploring more effective ways to address such challenges. Japan and the rest of the world should give serious thought to the question of whether we are heading into the right direction or not. More specifically:

- Is the NPT regime in crisis or unravelling as it confronts a wide array of challenges – particularly in view of compliance questions raised symbolically by Iran and North Korea. The spread of a global black market for nuclear technology and materials has reinforced this crisis. Is the India-U.S. nuclear deal really helpful in strengthening the NPT regime, as the leading stakeholder of such a regime, itself, has not followed long-accepted rules for peaceful use of civil nuclear energy?
- Is nuclear disarmament dead, as weapon modernization activities proceed and as more states claim security benefits from possessing such weapons? Perhaps the inaction in the Conference on Disarmament is only symptomatic and reflective of such trends?
- Is the world now facing the prospect of a “cascade” of states seeking weapons of mass destruction? What happened to the grand bargain that the world struck at the time of the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995? What could be the response to a nuclear test by North Korea, if one ever takes place at all? What would be its repercussions on the Iran issue?
- Are future acts of WMD terrorism not just an abstract possibility, but a growing probability? What if London’s recent foiled bomb scare had involved the use of binary chemical weapons rather than explosives?
- Will more and more states acquire long-range ballistic missiles, in a world that still lacks any binding rules governing their production or use?
- What is the world to conclude when even a major UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons adjourned this year without a consensus on a final document?

Though we will not be able to answer all or more of these questions, it is nevertheless fitting that Japan would provide the venue for today’s conference, since the people of Japan are more aware than ever of the threats they face from missile attack or from weapons of mass destruction.

Voices are being raised now throughout this country for a renewed international commitment to address such threats.

These voices are not only those of public officials, but also average citizens at the “grass-roots” of the political process – people who are both speaking out and organizing, as well illustrated by the enormously impressive “Mayors for Peace” initiative, which has succeeded in establishing ties among the mayors of a thousand cities worldwide. In Japan, I note the sustained efforts by religious groups to pursue similar enlightened goals. I also note that Parliamentarians are making progress in establishing their own national and international links, as demonstrated by Mr. Kono’s presence with us today.

I hope Japan should expand these networks within the neighbouring regions. Disarmament efforts must be built upon at the grassroots level, as well as nation by nation, and region by region. The people of Japan should reach out more actively to their neighbours, and together make significant contributions to disarmament and non-proliferation. I most welcome the representatives of NGOs and other citizens movements who are with us today.

With the assistance of the media, these various initiatives can continue to grow, as neighbours work with neighbours, until a powerful national and international network can emerge which cannot help but have a profound influence on public policy and official thinking.

So I wish to open this conference today on a positive and optimistic note – this is not the time to despair, this is the time to discover ways to build on the deep foundation of citizen support for inspired and creative initiatives that will lead us all to a safer and more secure world.

Finally, I wish to thank the Government of Japan and the city of Yokohama for their generous and steadfast support. I view such support as more than financial, but a form of leadership.

Distinguished participants, please accept my very best wishes as you now take up your difficult agenda.