

Opening Plenary Address

**Global Nuclear Disarmament:
The Road Travelled, The Road Ahead**

By

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I wish to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Mr. Hiroshi Taka, the Secretary General of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, for his courtesy in inviting me to speak at this event today. Though this is not my first trip to Hiroshima, it is my first opportunity to address this Council and I am very grateful for this honour.

Visitors to Hiroshima, wherever they are from, inevitably experience two somewhat contradictory reactions. At a glance, they are impressed with the beauty of this city, its new architecture, its youth, its dynamic commercial life, its natural parks, its scenic location on a famous harbour, surrounded by mountains, and its good-hearted, friendly people. The other reaction is one of great sadness for the memory of the tragic event that occurred here on the sixth of August 1945, an event that still remains painful even to recall, let alone discuss, especially amidst all the other pressing priorities of our daily lives.

Yet whenever I come to Hiroshima, I also have a third impression—one of deep respect for the tenacious resolve of the citizens of this historic city not just to remember the past, but to build for the future. For six decades now, mayors and other city officials from Hiroshima have eloquently expressed the deeply held views of all their fellow citizens that the future must bring a world without nuclear weapons. They understand that is not enough simply to take precautions against the use of such weapons. They understand that the only real guarantee against such uses will come with global nuclear disarmament.

As I speak today, experts estimate that there are some 26,000 nuclear weapons in this world. Many, if not all, of the states possessing such weapons are undertaking various activities to modernize their nuclear arsenals, or the various means to deliver them. Plans are in place to maintain these nuclear arsenals essentially indefinitely, while there are no concrete, operational plans or timetables for the progressive achievement of

nuclear disarmament. Some look upon these unpleasant realities and conclude that the campaign for global nuclear disarmament has failed.

This conclusion is simply wrong. We must not confuse disappointments and setbacks for a lost cause. We also must not forget the many milestones that have already been passed on our long journey to a world without nuclear weapons. Nuclear disarmament has not failed—it is simply a work in progress, and I am very excited about the prospects for its future, even though I know that the road ahead will be difficult.

But first let us consider the road we have already travelled. The United Nations has been working to seek the elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction, literally since the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on 24 January 1946. The General Assembly has had the issue of general and complete disarmament on its agenda since 1959, which seeks not only to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction but also to limit and regulate conventional armaments. The first Special Session of the General Assembly in 1978 agreed to call general and complete disarmament the UN's "ultimate objective". These actions have been reinforced by consensus decisions and final documents at Review Conferences of the states parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and in countless General Assembly resolutions, including several introduced by the government of Japan.

Yet, some say, these texts are only words, what about deeds? Well, the remaining 26,000 nuclear weapons are less than half the number reported to exist at the peak of the Cold War in the mid-1980s. Most if not all the recognized nuclear-weapon states—namely, China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States—have stopped producing fissile material for weapons, closed down their nuclear test sites, retired certain classes of nuclear weapons or their delivery vehicles, and declared further reductions in their stockpiles. All states possessing such weapons, even those outside the NPT, continue to support the goal of achieving a world free of nuclear

weapons. Vast areas of this planet have been designated as regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, including virtually the entire Southern Hemisphere and, most recently, Central Asia—this is the first such zone to be established entirely north of the Equator.

In civil society, the global movement for nuclear disarmament is indeed quite active and, by many indications, is growing. Former officials and national leaders in key countries have called publicly for new progress toward this goal. We are seeing more editorials now on nuclear disarmament in newspapers and commentaries on the web, literally around the world. The Mayors for Peace initiative, launched by the mayors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has succeeded in gaining the support of over 2,300 cities in 130 countries—this is, by any measure, a significant step forward for the great cause of global nuclear disarmament.

The General Assembly and the NPT states parties have made it quite clear where the world must go now on the road ahead for nuclear disarmament. They have identified some clear criteria for measuring progress in this field—future reductions should be transparent, internationally verified, irreversible, and undertaken in binding legal commitments. Unilateral declarations of reductions are of course welcome, but for disarmament to achieve its greatest effect in confidence-building and in strengthening security, these criteria offer a very useful and legitimate means to access future progress.

While prospects for disarmament will of course be influenced by the force of public opinion, it will also be shaped by general perceptions of international security. Here is where non-proliferation and efforts against nuclear terrorism play such an important role. Achieving disarmament will be difficult in a world in which more and more states are seeking or acquiring nuclear weapons, or a world plagued by the nightmare of the imminence of nuclear terrorism. This is why the UN and states around the world are working to achieve progress in all these areas. I encourage you all to join in efforts underway worldwide to support non-proliferation and counter-terrorism

efforts—these efforts are not a distraction from disarmament, but are important to its success. Progress in disarmament, meanwhile, will also help to alleviate proliferation and terrorism threats—especially by reducing quantities of fissile materials that could be used for explosive purposes, by de-legitimizing the possession of nuclear weapons, and by eliminating the international “double standard” that has allowed some states to retain nuclear weapons while denying such weapons to others.

The road ahead for disarmament will, even despite past progress, be difficult. Possessor states will likely continue to resist agreement to any timetables. Some will be reluctant to make their stockpiles more transparent. Some will resist verification. Some will oppose disarmament measures that are irreversible. And some will insist upon only declaring their own progress in disarmament, without effectively documenting it. We can expect to see commentaries and editorials questioning the wisdom of disarmament, warning of its risks, and attacking its effectiveness as a means to strengthen international peace and security.

I call upon you all to view such stances or views not with hostility, for bitterness and mean-spirited responses will accomplish nothing, but with an attitude of patient and persistent engagement. As a former Brazilian diplomat, and now as a UN official, I have been working for over four decades on issues relating to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I would not continue this work if I thought it was a lost cause or a cause not worth pursuing. It is instead one of noblest of all human activities and I am very proud to make my own contributions to this collective effort. So on this eve of the 2008 Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony, let us resolve to continue this important work. Let us not yield to despair, but reaffirm our dedication to pursue a nuclear-weapon-free world. Please accept my very best wishes for all your future work in this great and challenging field.