

Exhibition "Hiroshima and Nagasaki"

United Nations

10.30 a.m., 27 October 2008, B-neck area

Remarks by Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

I have the great privilege today of welcoming the Honourable Mayor of Hiroshima, Mr. Tadatoshi Akiba, and the Hibakusha to the opening of this exhibit dedicated to the memory of those who perished in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

These stark images remind us of the reality of nuclear weapons and the unspeakable devastation and human suffering that they caused. Hiroshima—and, three days later, Nagasaki—were wiped out in almost an instant and thousands of men, women, children were annihilated or condemned to interminable suffering by their exposure to radiation. No one can look at these pictures and remain untouched. I believe that every single one of us is moved to ask, what we can do to prevent this from happening again?

The Mayors for Peace initiative—composed of 2,422 cities in 131 countries—has responded to this question by creating a civil society movement for the elimination of nuclear weapons. This initiative is especially timely, given that 2008 is the first year that a majority of the world's population lives in cities—which, if nuclear weapons were ever again used, would surely be among the most likely targets.

The organization has educated the public on nuclear weapons issues through its effective outreach activities, including the exhibit that we have here today. This exhibit—which has traveled around the world since 1995—is on loan from the Mayors for Peace and is here today thanks to the cooperation of cities, NGOs, universities, and other organizations that share with the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a great common commitment: to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which requires all its parties and particularly, but not exclusively, the nuclear weapons States to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament. We are now in the preparatory phase for the Treaty's Review Conference in 2010 and I am gratified that new life has been injected into the process by recent initiatives, including those of past and present statesmen and the establishment of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. Combined with the persistent efforts of NGOs, mayors, legislators, religious leaders, women's groups, environmental activists, scholars, scientists, and journalists world-wide—these activities together send a promising signal for the strengthening of the NPT and for achieving its historic goals.

I urge all who support these goals to remember the tragic past, but also to reaffirm our common commitment to achieving a bright and constructive new future for humanity, in a world free of nuclear weapons. We have much work to do. Let us begin today.