

Opening Plenary Address

A New Dawn for Nuclear Disarmament

By

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It is a great honour for me to be with you today to address the achievement of global nuclear disarmament—a subject that is increasingly being discussed throughout the world community. I am deeply grateful to Mr. Hiroshi Taka, the Secretary General of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs for inviting me to speak, and more importantly, for his persistent and dedicated efforts for progress in achieving this great goal.

Yesterday, I had another great honour: to read the personal message of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima. In paying his respects to those men, women, and children who lost their lives in the atomic bombings in August 1945—as well as to the *hibakusha*—he stated that nuclear disarmament was the only reliable way to prevent any future use of such weapons.

You in this audience of course already know this to be true, yet many people around the world have placed their faith in various alternative means for dealing with nuclear weapons. Some say that nuclear disarmament must be postponed until the larger problems of war and peace are solved first. Yet that would only lead to the indefinite postponement of progress on disarmament, which has its own contributions to make in addressing those fundamental issues of war and peace.

Others believe that future uses of nuclear weapons can be prevented by the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which is practiced in one way or another by each country that possesses such weapons, even as they also support the goal of disarmament.

The foundation of that doctrine is an assumption that the only reason such weapons have not been used is because of the threat of devastating retaliation in kind. This is the deadly logic of what has come to be called, “mutual assured destruction”—also known by its famous acronym, MAD. It was this type of reasoning that inspired the international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by the distinguished Swedish diplomat Hans Blix, to entitle their 2006 report, *Weapons of Terror*—a term that conveys exactly the intended purpose of such weapons: to exploit the fears and horrors of nuclear war as a means of discouraging their use.

This doctrine of nuclear deterrence was born in the Cold War and was originally applied to the strategic nuclear relationship between the two superpowers at the time, the United States and the Soviet Union. Historians still debate the claim that the lack of a nuclear war between these countries was due to nuclear deterrence. We have heard many contrary views, including from experts like former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who concluded long after the Cuban Missile Crisis that “it was luck that prevented nuclear war.”

Our world today is even more complex, and in many ways, more dangerous than during the Cold War—and I think we can all agree that “luck” is hardly a solid foundation for maintaining international peace and security. We now have not two but nine states that are known or widely believed to possess such weapons. We have concerns that more states might be seeking them—fortunately, not many more, but the concerns persist nonetheless. And we are also all aware that as more fissile nuclear material is produced, stored, used, and transported around the world, risks will grow that such material might one day be acquired by non-state actors and used in their own “weapons of terror.”

What is perhaps most astonishing is that this doctrine of nuclear deterrence has been perpetuated even though our world has entirely changed. Today, the nations and peoples of our planet are more closely linked today—by commerce, communication, and mutual security interests—than they were during the Cold War era, yet countries are still preserving and perfecting the means to annihilate each other using the most devastating and indiscriminate weapons ever devised in human history.

Fortunately, the tragic absurdity of this situation is becoming more widely appreciated throughout the world today, and I strongly believe that this trend will continue in the years ahead. It has been my privilege to have worked on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues for much of my diplomatic career, which began over 50 years ago. And I can truly say that the prospects for real progress in nuclear disarmament are better now than in any time throughout those many years—even equalling or surpassing the optimism that existed after the end of the Cold War almost 20 years ago.

I am very encouraged by the statements by the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation this year affirming their common commitment to work for a world free of nuclear weapons and specifically to work for new reductions in their own nuclear arsenals. They have recognized that such actions are linked to their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, another very welcome development. By the end of the year, they are working to complete negotiations on a treaty to replace the START treaty, which expires next December, and they have agreed to address further reductions next year.

Prospects have improved also for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the world has welcomed President Obama's intention to seek ratification of this treaty by the United States. There have been over a dozen nuclear tests in Asia alone in the post-Cold War era. While the NPT's nuclear-weapon states are maintaining their moratoria on nuclear tests, the time has clearly come for a total global ban on such tests and entry into force of the CTBT is the way this must be achieved. Japan's leadership on this issue has been welcomed throughout the world, and I do believe that this goal will be achieved.

Another development with significant impact on progress in achieving global nuclear disarmament should be mentioned in this context—namely, the agreement of the members of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to start negotiations on a treaty to ban the production of fissile materials for use in weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. These negotiations will of course not be easy, yet it is still encouraging to see some progress in this difficult field, since global nuclear disarmament will clearly require strict controls over the production and use of the special types of nuclear materials that produced the bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We have also witnessed unilateral actions and statements from all the NPT's nuclear-weapon states indicating that they are willing to take additional steps to limit their own nuclear arsenals. In addition to the recent progress involving the United States and the Russian Federation, France has closed both its nuclear test site and its facilities for producing nuclear materials for use in weapons, while the United Kingdom has reduced its nuclear arsenal and has launched an initiative to study the technical requirements for verifying the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments. China is maintaining its moratorium on nuclear tests and is the only nuclear-weapon-state to have adopted a no-first-use nuclear doctrine.

These positive steps, of course, are not sufficient to achieve global nuclear disarmament. Legal commitments are needed to halt the further development and production of such weapons. On 24 October last year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched a five-point proposal to achieve global nuclear disarmament—one element of that plan was a call for talks on a nuclear-weapon convention or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments for achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Other nuclear disarmament proposals have been launched by groups in civil society, notably the “Global Zero” initiative, which will assemble a summit of world leaders next year and produce a major documentary film on nuclear disarmament. There are countless other nuclear disarmament initiatives that have been launched by civil society groups throughout the world, which are fully in common cause with your own efforts by the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

I of course wish to recognize Japan’s partnership with Australia in establishing the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, which will issue its report early next year. Last April, Japan also announced an 11-point proposal for achieving nuclear disarmament, an initiative that follows many years of Japan’s nuclear disarmament resolutions in the UN General Assembly. The European Parliament has also put forward its own initiative in support of global nuclear disarmament. These of course are only some of the many international initiatives I have witnessed in recent years—all of which suggest a resurgence of interest in countries around the world for the pursuit of this great goal.

The sheer number of these various initiatives is very encouraging—though the world will also be looking very closely at their actual content to see if they really will achieve their stated goals. For many years, the United Nations General Assembly has been adopting resolutions on disarmament issues that identify some standards for assessing such progress. These include the criteria of irreversibility, transparency, verification, and bindingness. The intention of these standards is both to ensure that disarmament is actually occurring and to provide confidence and security as this goal is achieved. These are good standards indeed, and I encourage you all to use them as you assess the progress that is being made in this field in the years ahead.

I would like now to conclude my remarks on a personal note. Like all visitors to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I too have been both deeply moved by the experience of the human tragedy that occurred in these cities sixty-four years ago. Yet I have also been deeply impressed by the level of commitment of the citizens and mayors of these cities, for over six decades, to respect the past while preparing for a more peaceful and prosperous future. Through your collective efforts, you have stirred the conscience of the world. You have shown a form of human dedication and leadership that will lead the way to a new dawn for disarmament efforts worldwide, and that will speed the arrival of the last sunset for the world’s deadliest weapon.

Please accept my best wishes for the success of all your efforts.