

Remarks by Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Opening of Kazakhstan/Japan Joint Exhibition on “Against Nuclear Arms” United Nations 10 August 2009

I wish to begin my brief remarks today by thanking Ambassador Takasu of Japan and Ambassador Aitimova of Kazakhstan for their efforts in making this Joint Exhibition possible on a very timely subject indeed—“Against Nuclear Arms.”

There could not possibly be a better choice than the United Nations as a venue for this exhibition. After all, disarmament is part of the Charter and the UN has specifically been seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons—along with other weapons adaptable to mass destruction—since the adoption of the General Assembly’s first resolution in 1946.

Within the UN Disarmament Commission, the First Committee of the General Assembly, and at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva— together what we call the UN disarmament machinery— Japan and Kazakhstan have long demonstrated their shared commitment to achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Both countries have their own unique stories to tell about nuclear weapons, which merit the attention of the entire world. Though these stories are different in many respects, they are united by one common feature—they deal with the tragic *consequences* of such weapons.

In Japan, the consequences from the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki lasted long after the immediate devastation and tragic loss of life—each year, the entire world commemorates these tragic events, honours the *hibakusha*, and reaffirms a collective determination to pursue global nuclear disarmament. Just last week, I visited both cities to convey a message from the Secretary-General and to voice my support for the persistent efforts by the citizens and Government of Japan to seek a world free of such weapons.

In Kazakhstan, these consequences took the form of widespread contamination of the natural environment and devastating effects on the health and safety of its citizens, as a result of the literally hundreds of nuclear tests that took place under or above its territory. This is a legacy that did not end with the cessation of nuclear tests, as the burdens of protecting the public from the lasting effects of these tests will continue indefinitely.

It is vitally important for the world to hear these stories. Too often, we encounter claims about the great value of nuclear weapons in preventing war. About how only they can protect a country against the threat of attack. About how they are a source of pride, prestige, and status. And

about how safe and secure these weapons are, along with the workers who are involved in producing them, and the citizens who live near weapons-related sites.

This Joint Exhibition provides a healthy response to such claims, by showing clearly and graphically some of the horrible consequences from the use and testing of such weapons. It is my great hope that this exhibition will not only open up some eyes, but also some minds—in particular, to encourage people to understand the great wisdom in pursuing global nuclear disarmament.

Thirty-one years ago, the first Special Session of the General Assembly on disarmament adopted by consensus a Final Document that said the following on this issue, and I believe this remains as relevant and compelling today as it was the day it was agreed:

The most effective guarantee against the danger of nuclear war and the use of nuclear weapons is nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Fortunately, hopes for significant progress toward achieving this goal have been growing in recent years. All the states with nuclear weapons officially support this objective, which will be a key subject at the summit meeting of the UN Security Council next month that will be chaired by President Obama. Kazakhstan is no longer a site for the stationing and testing of strategic nuclear weapons, but is instead a co-founder of the first nuclear-weapon-free zone entirely in the northern hemisphere. Japan and Australia have launched a major international commission that will soon produce a report that will identify steps needed to achieve nuclear disarmament—an initiative accompanied by Japan's own recent proposal and its related resolutions in the General Assembly. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has launched his own five-point nuclear disarmament proposal. And senior world statesmen and non-governmental groups around the world are speaking out and generating initiatives to move this global process forward.

So I congratulate the governments of Japan and Kazakhstan for their efforts in making this Joint Exhibition possible. I commend it to all who wish to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons—and even to all who have not yet been convinced that this is the right course ahead. This is truly an exhibition for all to see—and I am especially grateful for the opportunity to participate in its opening here at the United Nations.