

Opening Remarks

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21st UN Conference on Disarmament Issues

From Niigata to the World:
Renewed Determination and Action Toward a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

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Your Excellency Dr. Saudabayev, Mr. Asano, Governor Izumida, Mayor Shinoda, Deputy Mayor Chita, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to open the Twenty-first United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in the beautiful and historical City of Niigata. Niigata, also known as the “City of Water” is not only Japan’s largest producer of a multitude of rice-based products and agricultural produce, but is also one of Japan’s pioneer port cities, which was opened for international trade in the 19th century. Today, it continues to contribute to Japan’s integration into the world economy as a leading economic power.

By adopting a “Non-Nuclear Peace City Declaration” in 2005, Niigata City and its citizens have demonstrated a noble commitment to striving for lasting world peace and security. This is an emphatic and inspiring declaration from a city that was on the list of possible targets for an atomic bombing in 1945.

As this annual conference enters its twenty-first year, I wish to extend my deep and sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for hosting and supporting this conference series over the last two decades and for its many dedicated efforts to promote international security and disarmament.

Japan is a key player in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation. The announcement by Foreign Minister Nakasone of eleven benchmarks for global nuclear disarmament—and the earlier establishment of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament—are only two recent illustrations of that leadership. These of course follow Japan’s countless resolutions on nuclear disarmament in the UN General Assembly, which are adopted each year by overwhelming majorities.

This series of UN Conferences on Disarmament Issues has developed into an internationally recognized forum for constructive dialogue on pressing issues on the international disarmament agenda. By bringing together policy-makers, public officials, academia, as well as members of civil society and the mass media, these conferences provide an authoritative venue where all these stakeholders come together to address some of the gravest security challenges facing the international community, and which could only be successfully confronted through extensive international cooperation.

The dangers posed by existing nuclear weapons—and the risks of the proliferation of such weapons or their acquisition by non-state actors—collectively pose the gravest challenges to international peace and security. The degree of success or failure in addressing these challenges therefore has profound implications for the entire world. While disarmament is not an end in itself, it is the only logical and responsible strategy to ensure against the use of nuclear weapons, which would be catastrophic to virtually all the great goals of the UN Charter.

This Conference will accordingly explore ways and means to translate the vision of a nuclear weapon-free world into concrete actions. These include some preliminary steps aimed at significantly reducing nuclear arsenals, enhancing efforts to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force, and negotiating—at long last—a fissile materials treaty. Preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons is another indispensable aspect of achieving that goal. In this respect, the ongoing diplomatic effort to achieve a denuclearized Korean peninsula is a topic that will receive some particular attention at this Conference.

Progress in all of these areas can only be achieved through active/creative diplomacy, innovative thinking and political will. We are currently witnessing signs of a growing momentum towards achieving the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. This momentum has materialized in a variety of initiatives not just by civil society but by nuclear-weapons States and non-nuclear weapons States alike.

In that context, it is encouraging to note 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 (NPT), 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.

On 24 September, President Barack Obama will preside over a high-level meeting of the Security Council devoted to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This will be the first time that the Council has ever met at the level of Heads of State or Government to address nuclear disarmament—and its last high-level meeting on non-proliferation occurred in 1992.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also shown a special interest in issues relating to nuclear weapons. In a speech to the EastWest Institute on 24 October 2008, he presented a five-point proposal for achieving a world free of such weapons. In brief, his proposal called for negotiations on effective nuclear disarmament measures, whether through a nuclear-weapon convention or a framework of mutually-reinforcing instruments. He urged the Security Council to address issues of security in the process of disarmament. He called for measures to strengthen the rule of law in disarmament, especially by concluding new treaties, achieving universal membership in other treaties, and promoting the development of nuclear-weapon-free zones, including in the Middle East. He underscored the importance of transparency and accountability for disarmament, the need to eliminate other types of weapons of mass destruction, and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty. In addition, he called for many other complementary initiatives, including controls over missiles, space weapons, and conventional arms.

By making use of modern information technology tools, the United Nations is also stepping up its efforts to raise awareness of the dangers and costs of nuclear weapons. On 13 June, the UN Secretary-General launched a multiplatform campaign under the slogan “*WMD – We Must Disarm*” to mark the 100-day countdown leading up to the International Day of Peace on 21 September. He

has been joined in this campaign by several organizations, such as Global Zero, as well as by celebrities including United Nations Messenger of Peace Mr. Michael Douglas. As part of this campaign, the United Nations has also launched a competition for the best short film on the issue of nuclear disarmament and/or non-proliferation.

Next May, the United Nations will host the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which will be a real test of States parties' political will and creative diplomacy. Its outcome will have a significant and far-reaching impact in shaping the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda for many years to come. I am especially pleased to acknowledge the presence with us today of Ambassador Cabactulan, the President-elect of that Review Conference, and hope that he will find our present deliberations useful as he continues his preparations for that important event.

Our present Conference will also address several issues relating to conventional arms. Fifty years ago, the General Assembly combined the goals of conventional arms control and WMD disarmament into the term "general and complete disarmament under effective international control," which has long served as the "ultimate objective" of the United Nations. Our Conference will specifically address measures aimed at banning or restricting the use of certain types of conventional weapons, particularly anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, thus mitigating their humanitarian impact. We will also consider efforts to establish a global Arms Trade Treaty, and address the heavy tolls on social and economic development inflicted by armed violence fueled by illicit arms.

In effect, the topics on this Conference's agenda are not only weighty because they address global and regional peace and security, but also because these issues are linked inextricably to human security, social and economic development, and human rights—thus affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of ordinary citizens across the world.

The important role of civil society and mass media in fostering and supporting efforts to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation goals cannot be overemphasized. History has shown that an effective partnership between governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the mass media is indispensable to achieving real progress in disarmament and non-proliferation.

I am very pleased to state that this is the first time that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (RCPD) has organized this annual Conference after its successful relocation to Kathmandu, Nepal, in August 2008. On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, I would like to thank all countries, in particular those from the Asia/Pacific Region, for their financial and in-kind support and assistance to the Regional Centre over the years, and count on their continued and generous support to the Regional Centre in the coming years.

I very much look forward to a lively, dynamic, informative, and productive deliberations and discussions in the days ahead.

Please accept my very best wishes for a successful Conference.