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Remarks to Mayors for Peace

Towards a Decisive Decade for Nuclear Disarmament: 2010-2020

by

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It is always a pleasure to welcome individuals and groups to the United Nations, especially those that are as deeply committed to disarmament as Mayors for Peace. We are honoured that so many mayors took time off from their many other duties to be here today.

I wish in particular to recognize the presence of Mayor Akiba of Hiroshima and Mayor Taue of Nagasaki. How fitting it is that the cities that suffered so much from the nuclear attacks of 1945 would be leading mayors throughout the world to support the only reliable means to ensure that such attacks will never happen again—namely, global nuclear disarmament. Also amongst us today is the Mayor of Akron, Ohio—Mr. Donald Plusquellic—who is President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

I have worked in this field for many years, and with each passing year, I become more impressed with the wide and growing variety of groups that are diligently working now for a nuclear-weapon-free world. In addition to the disarmament and arms control community, we have seen an outpouring of interest from women, environmentalists, human rights activists, religious leaders, professional groups including lawyers, doctors and educators, and of course, representatives of cities from throughout the world.

This interest of municipal officials in nuclear disarmament may surprise some people, especially given all of the other urgent and difficult problems that city leaders face with each working day. Yet many such leaders – more each year – understand what is at stake in advancing a disarmament agenda.

They know that if weapons of mass destruction are ever again used, they will likely be used in cities. They know not only who would be at risk, but also who would have to deal most directly with the consequences of any such use. They know who would have to provide what are called the “first-responders” – the fire-fighting, medical, police, and other such services that would be needed to deal with the aftermath of any such catastrophe.

In these circumstances, I don't find it at all surprising that the membership of Mayors for Peace has grown substantially over the years—it now extends to over 2,800 cities in 134 countries. Despite their diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, members of Mayors for Peace are united in solidarity on the need to get on with the work of eliminating what the independent Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission has called these “weapons of terror.”

Your visit to the United Nations is very timely indeed. Yesterday was the opening day of the important third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference. As the President of the 2005 Review Conference, I know well how important it is for the Preparatory Committee to fulfil its mandate before these Review Conferences, especially the importance of reaching agreement on an agenda for such conferences and, hopefully, a consensus on some substantive recommendations.

Of course, I cannot predict the outcome of these deliberations. But I do know that the stakes are high and the most important single factor that will influence this outcome remains, as always, the political will of the participating states. As all members of Mayors for Peace well know, this “political will” does not spring from nowhere—it is often significantly influenced by, or at times even a direct consequence of, the voices of the public, as expressed through legislators, mayors, and groups throughout society.

For this reason, I wish to assure you both that your words and deeds are more important than ever, and without question, your presence here today is warmly welcomed at the United Nations. Please consider this historic site in some small way your home. This is the place where problems are addressed that often have no passports, that recognize no national boundaries, and that are of interest not only to our fellow citizens today, but also to future generations.

While I cannot predict the state of disarmament at the end of the next decade, I do believe that the next two years will be a time for some significant steps forward in disarmament. If and when this occurs, I have little doubt that the citizens and mayors of the world’s cities will not only welcome them, but deservedly take some measure of credit for their various contributions.

The Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States have issued statements endorsing the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world and are now negotiating the next stage of reductions in the nuclear arsenals. We may soon start seeing some changes in the doctrines that evolved during the Cold War to govern the deployment and use of nuclear weapons. Prospects for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are once again brightening. Negotiations may soon begin in Geneva on a verifiable fissile material treaty. I believe we will also see some progress in preventing the global spread of such weapons—a prediction that is closely dependent upon the level of progress achieved in disarmament.

All of these steps will not alone produce a nuclear-weapon-free world. Yet they would certainly constitute important steps in the right direction. They would help progressively to delegitimize the very existence of nuclear weapons, a far more significant challenge than merely seeking to keep such weapons out of the “wrong hands.”

Of course, much work lies ahead to achieve this goal and your contributions will be crucial. So please accept my deepest congratulations for all you have already accomplished through your efforts over so many years—and my very best wishes for success in the years ahead.