

Opening Remarks

By

Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



The 22nd United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues

*“A Nuclear-Weapon-Free World:
Making Steady Progress from Vision to Action”*

Saitama, Japan
25 August 2010

State Secretary Mr. Takemasa, Mayor Shimizu, Deputy Mayor Toyoda, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to open the Twenty-second United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in the beautiful City of Saitama. By adopting a “Peace City Declaration” in 2005 and by taking concrete steps to promote international understanding among its citizens, Saitama City has demonstrated its firm commitment to strive for lasting world peace and security, and progress in disarmament. You have translated your municipal motto—‘A City Open to the World’—into concrete deeds. And in so doing, you created a model for other cities to follow who share your strong convictions.

As I am attending this UN Conference on Disarmament Issues in Japan for the second time, I wish to reiterate my deep and sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for hosting and supporting this conference series over the last twenty two years and for its many dedicated efforts to promote international security and disarmament.

Japan has long played an active role in promoting disarmament and non-proliferation. Last year’s report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament—established by Australia and Japan—has helped to re-energize global efforts towards achieving a world without nuclear weapons. The submission by Japan and Australia of a joint policy proposal on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, along with several other official working papers at that event, further underscored the priority of these issues. Japan’s leadership in promoting disarmament and non-proliferation education was also noteworthy at the Review Conference. In addition, Japan’s annual nuclear disarmament resolutions in the General Assembly have gained overwhelming support. The country has also led efforts to promote the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the negotiation of a fissile material treaty.

I must say that the timing of this Conference—coming so soon after the Secretary-General’s historic visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki—could hardly be better. And I am especially pleased that 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 a common venue where all these stakeholders can come together to address authoritatively some of the gravest security challenges facing the international community, and which could only be successfully confronted through extensive international cooperation. As the Conference is open to the public, it has also proved to be effective in generating public interest in disarmament issues.

The agenda for the next two and a half days covers a broad range of disarmament issues under the theme of “A Nuclear Weapons-Free World: Steady Progress from Vision to Action”. In many ways, I believe that the year 2010 will mark a turning point in the history of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation—these issues are certainly back on the global agenda and are viewed by increasing numbers of States as matters of some urgency. The Secretary-General has repeatedly emphasized the importance of new progress in achieving a nuclear weapons-free world—a theme he underscored in his statements earlier this month at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, including his address at the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima, the first ever by a Secretary-General.

As international expectations for progress in this field continue to grow, I find it quite appropriate that the first session of this Conference will consider the outcome of the NPT Review Conference last May and the way forward. The wealth of expertise among our participants ensures that this particular UN conference is especially well equipped to analyze what has been achieved and what’s next for the international community in achieving the fundamental goals of that treaty. In this regard, I am especially pleased to acknowledge the presence with us today of Ambassador Cabactulan, the President of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

This Conference will also give participants some opportunities to discuss frankly the concrete steps needed to achieve a nuclear weapon-free world. These include the new START Treaty signed by the Russian Federation and the United States last April and various issues raised in the nuclear policy reviews conducted by those two States. Multilateral diplomacy to bring the CTBT into force, and to negotiate a fissile materials treaty are also included in our agenda as we need to explore urgently ways to achieve these goals. The Nuclear Security Summit last April in Washington, D.C. will also receive some particular attention at this Conference, as the international community is expected to implement necessary action at a national, regional and international level, with a view to the next Summit in the Republic of Korea in 2012.

On his part, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has repeatedly underlined the priority he has attached to achieving progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In a speech to the EastWest Institute in October 2008, he presented a five-point proposal for achieving a world free of such weapons. Some of his initiatives have already been moving forward. One example was the convening of the first meeting of the Security Council at the level of Heads of State or Government devoted to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It was also encouraging to see two references in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference to his five-point proposal, including mention of the nuclear weapons convention. However, daunting tasks remain to be addressed. Further efforts are needed to promote the entry into force of the CTBT and to

start the negotiations on a fissile materials treaty in the Conference on Disarmament. On 24 September, the Secretary-General will convene a high-level meeting at UN Headquarters in support of the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Now, these various nuclear challenges are clearly global in scope. Yet the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation, and the regulation of armaments also have an important regional dimension, which provides the rationale for the choice of session III of this conference. Without question, these are themes that merit careful consideration.

The important role of civil society in contributing to the achievement of disarmament and non-proliferation goals should also be highlighted, given the cascade of civil society initiatives we have seen in recent years to advance nuclear disarmament—these include most notably work in promoting an international legal instrument, a nuclear weapons convention.

The role of civil society will also be discussed in the context of disarmament and non-proliferation education, as this is the only way to sustain global efforts by future generations toward achieving—or eventually maintaining—global nuclear disarmament. I would like to urge participants to explore ways to make disarmament and non-proliferation a priority in higher education and to raise its profile, to expand public awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons, and to advance concrete steps to enhance cooperation among governments, international organizations and civil society in this challenging field.

Finally, I must commend the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD)—not just for its contributions in organizing this conference, but also for its other peace and disarmament activities, which include regional meetings on small arms issues. The Centre has had a very good start since its relocation from the Headquarters in New York to Kathmandu, Nepal in 2008.

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, I would also 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 wish in closing to express my deepest thanks for your own personal contributions in advancing the UN Charter's great goals of disarmament and the regulation of armaments. We are here today not because these challenges are easy, but because they are important to the entire world. So please accept my very best wishes for a productive conference.