

Opening Remarks

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The 19th United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Sapporo

*New vision and required leadership towards a world free from nuclear weapons
and other weapons of mass destruction*

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Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

Though I have had the good fortune to meet many of you on other occasions in my diplomatic career, I am pleased to address you today as the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. The history of this series of UN Conferences on Disarmament simply could not have been written without the extraordinary support provided by the Japanese Government and local governmental authorities -- both in terms of financing and administrative assistance.

I would like therefore to ask Mr. Nakane -- the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry's Disarmament, Non-proliferation, and Science Department -- if he would kindly convey to his Government my deepest respects for its efforts in making this Conference and all the previous conferences possible. Japan has also provided generous financial support to the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, while also supporting meetings -- held here in Sapporo -- of expert groups on the establishment of a Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and the nuclear-weapon-free status of Mongolia. This is all in addition to Japan's ongoing efforts against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, its promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation education, and its success in building overwhelming support in the General Assembly for Japan's annual resolution on nuclear disarmament.

I thank also Ms. Takahashi, the distinguished Governor of Hokkaido Prefecture, and Mayor Ueda, the honourable Mayor of Sapporo City -- and their staffs -- for their own assistance in organizing this event. We are all very fortunate indeed to gather here in Sapporo -- the site of the 1972 Winter Olympics and the world-renowned annual Snow Festivals. I understand that this year marks the 15th anniversary of the "Peace Charter of the Sapporo Citizens." And next year, the Hokkaido Prefecture will host the G8 summit, further demonstrating the same spirit of world citizenship that I sense in this room today.

I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Akiba, the honourable Mayor of Hiroshima City, at the Peace Ceremony earlier this month, and his moral leadership in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament – as apparent in the Mayors for Peace initiative, among many other efforts -- has earned him great respect throughout the world.

It is sometimes said that “all politics is local politics”. There is much truth in that adage. What is surprising, however, is the extent that disarmament is itself a local matter. Given all the many day-to-day worries that preoccupy local government officials, one might not expect a high level of interest in this complex international challenge.

Yet support for disarmament -- especially the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction -- remains strong amongst the people throughout the world. After all, the people are themselves the great beneficiaries of progress in disarmament -- for the elimination of weapons that are intended to cause large-scale, indiscriminate harm to civilian populations is the only truly reliable way to ensure against the use of such weapons. This is only one of many common bonds linking the people of the world with the citizens of Sapporo, Hokkaido, and the nation of Japan.

Yet much work remains to be done at all levels of society, from individual citizens, through the smallest local governments to the largest universal organization, the United Nations. In the days ahead, we will examine many such challenges, including the elimination and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the need to ensure that nuclear energy is used exclusively for peaceful purposes, international cooperation against some of the world’s most deadly forms of terrorism, and the need to strengthen the WMD treaty regimes.

These subjects are very much the focus of ongoing efforts in the United Nations disarmament machinery, including the Secretariat’s new Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The Secretary-General has stated many times that he views as a “personal priority” the need to revitalize multilateral efforts in disarmament and non-proliferation and I very much look forward to hearing your views on how we may together fulfill this solemn mandate.

I believe that gatherings such as this offer a rare, but indispensable opportunity to foster the development of a professional disarmament and arms control community, both in the region and beyond. These conferences are much more than simply occasions to make speeches or to exchange business cards. They enable us all to keep informed about the most recent research in these fields. They help us to expand our networks of contacts. They provide a forum for discussing or debating specific policy initiatives and to pose questions about the meanings or effects of existing policies. At best, they help us all to identify how the world can better solve the difficult disarmament and non-proliferation problems that continue to jeopardize international peace and security.

I am particularly interested in your thoughts and proposals on how the world can once again unite disarmament and non-proliferation -- two challenges that the Secretary-General has described as “inextricably linked”, yet which all too often are treated either in isolation, or at times even as conflicting goals. It is time to restore a sense of common purpose in this area -- to treat these issues as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

With these preliminary thoughts, I would like to close my remarks and wish you all a very successful conference. I hereby declare open the 19th United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Sapporo.