

Forum I: Dialogue between governments and citizens for a nuclear weapon-free, peaceful and just world

It is my pleasure to be with you today and participate in this dialogue. During my long career in the Austrian diplomatic service I have learned how important the dialogue between civil society and governments is. This holds true especially for the field of nuclear disarmament which is an existential question for everyone. Many of the most important impulses have come from civil society, e.g. the idea to ban nuclear weapons by a treaty even when nuclear armed states are not ready to give up their nuclear arsenals. In order to realize such initiatives civil society needs the cooperation of a cross regional group of states that share this objective. This has worked well in the case of the TPNW which was adopted after negotiations in the UN framework in 2017 by 122 states. Since then half of the world's states have already signed and we see that the number continues to go up. How needed the TPNW was, can be seen in many respects. It was e.g. the first nuclear disarmament treaty that is also addressing victim assistance and environmental rehabilitation.

Both for civil society activists and for non-nuclear weapon states it is an issue of self-empowerment to take initiatives. The alternatives are clear: Do you want to be waiting forever for the nuclear armed states to fulfill their obligation of nuclear disarmament under the NPT and just watch them to continue their nuclear arms race leading us further away from the goal of a nuclear weapon free world? Or are we acting in favor of getting closer to our objective of a world without nuclear weapons? Yes, our means and influence are limited, but when we do it together it adds up and it can become a powerful force.

It has been one of the best experiences in my professional life to have been closely involved in bringing about and negotiating the TPNW as the head of the

Austrian delegation. Austria could not have played a lead role without the support of its population for nuclear disarmament which motivates all political parties to demand a strong engagement for nuclear abolition from the government.

In a democratic society you cannot leave security policy to a closed circle of generals and public servants. It is the security of everyone, it is human security that is at play. So everyone should have a say. States are not abstract things, they consist of millions of individuals with a face, a political opinion and a longing for peace and security.

80 years have passed since the end of the Second World War and countries like Japan or those in Western Europe have enjoyed peace since then. The horrors of war have been largely forgotten and with new challenges to our security, military responses seem to gain in attraction. It is necessary to teach the younger generation the inhumanity and suffering that armed conflict and especially nuclear weapons bring. I want to thank the hibakusha for their relentless efforts in this regard.

Recently the world has become a more dangerous place with heightened tensions in most regions such as East Asia and Europe. We increasingly hear a false narrative that nuclear weapons do provide security. Here in Hiroshima we do not have to explain why nuclear weapons cannot make us more secure, but in reality cause insecurity and ultimately death of hundred of thousands of innocent civilians. The whole concept of nuclear deterrence is based on the will to destroy our world. Without this determination an opponent would not be deterred. And what about when an opponent would test the resolve of his enemy to use nuclear weapons, to trigger mutually assured destruction, rightly abbreviated to MAD?

And yet, polls show that a considerable number of people are in favour of nuclear weapons to - as they are told – „protect“ them. We have to counter this dangerous narrative and the facts are on our side. It is wishful thinking that nuclear weapons will not explode one day. Statisticians tell us that it was

sheer luck that it has not happened for a long period, but luck will run out somewhen. It is wishful dreaming that nuclear weapons prevent war. Nuclear armed states did get into military conflict already, just think of India and Pakistan.

It has been said that truth is the first victim of war. I fear that negating the truth of the horrors of nuclear weapons could make us all. In my view we all, civil society and states, have a shared responsibility to counter any statements that nuclear weapons are needed to preserve peace.

Doubts regarding the reliability of the new US administration vis-à-vis their allies' security have triggered discussions in some of them whether or not to develop their own nuclear weapons. These thoughts are based on the erroneous assumption that protection by nuclear weapons is necessary for national security, as if the big majority of states that are neither nuclear armed nor under a nuclear umbrella would be hazardously neglecting their security.

Such a program to develop nuclear weapons by a hitherto non-nuclear weapon state would be a clear violation of the NPT and might be the trigger for new nuclear weapons programs by additional states competing in the region, but possibly also in far away regions. A taboo would be broken. The effect would be less security and possibly the end of non-proliferation and its legal embodiment in the NPT. For more than 5 decades the consensus among the international community has been that we do not want more nuclear armed states. The non-proliferation regime would be shattered and the number of nuclear armed states could double with a concomitant steep increase of the risk of nuclear weapons use.

We have to add to this the demise of bilateral disarmament treaties, the heightened tensions poisoning the atmosphere for disarmament talks and the renewed nuclear arms race syphoning much needed huge sums for welfare away for building and maintaining ever more deadly and quicker nuclear weapons systems. No doubt, we are standing at a crossroad.

Engagement for nuclear disarmament and a world free from nuclear weapons is more needed than ever. ///