

Joseph Gerson

Thank you for the introduction. I want to talk about two things. I want to talk about the driving forces behind the crisis that we face and underline how dangerous the moment is. And I want to talk a bit after about the world conference in New York.

Let me begin by saying that much of what Minister Gallhofer said in his talk you could hear in disarmament meetings in the United States. It's a very familiar discourse to us and I really appreciate it. In many ways, what he described in the first part of his speech around the breaking of treaties and the new armaments being developed might be seen as the tinder being assembled for a bonfire -- an apocalyptic bonfire. It can also be seen as the symptoms of deeper issues that threaten our survival. And I want to begin by focusing on those.

I think we need to understand that the post-Cold War era is over. We are in an interregnum, a dangerous and uncertain interregnum, between the end of the post-Cold War period, and the emergence of a multi-polar era in which the U.S. will be one of a number of major imperial and nuclear powers, but not the only one. I think it's important to understand just how destabilizing the US destruction of the INF treaty is and the danger of the New START Treaty not being extended. It's a limited treaty, but it provides a little bit of a foundation for building mutual trust and understanding.

And we hear in the United States now signals that Trump and the Republicans want to withdraw from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. What we're approaching is an unrivaled nuclear arms race. It certainly is dangerous, probably more so, than any time in the Cold War. And I think we need to think about the environment that we're in, in this interregnum, in this transitional period. Maybe most important is, it's a period of tension between rising and declining powers. If you look at history and there's a thing called the Thucydides Trap which talks about the dynamic leading toward conflict between rising and declining powers. It grew out of Greek history 2,000 years ago. But if you look at the history, perhaps in 14 occasions, you had such major dynamics at play. In 10 of those cases, it led to disastrous wars. Like the period that led to World War I, we have complex alliance structures and we have increasing nationalism. We see that playing out here, in the tensions between Japan and Korea, not to mention others. We have territorial disputes, whether it's the South China Sea or the Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands. Miscalculations there could lead to incidents which could all too easily escalate. There were gunshots in Sarajevo in 1914 that led to escalation into world war.

We have economic integration and competition, and now we have Trump's sanctions and we have Trump's tariffs. We have a new era of protectionism. And we should appreciate that this is one of the forces that led to the second world war. And of course, we have wild card actors, Trump, not being the least of that. You know, I've been coming to Japan for a long time, and one of the things that I observed is the kind of the disorientation of people in Japan as China, which was a backward country, became a major power. And Japanese society trying to figure out how to adjust to this change. Well in the United States, we have a similar disjunction, right? The ideology in the United States of the Manifest Destiny or the uniqueness of the United States, there's a sense—and it's something that grows out of White Christianity—there's a sense that "Of course we dominate the world. And it's our right to do it, it's our God-given role in the world." Well, that's being challenged now. And this disorientation, which I think is a part of what fuels the racism, and the arrogance is the brutality of Trump. And we have this increasingly severe US-Chinese competition. As bad as the relations between the United States and Russia are, the most recent acting Secretary of Defense in the United States, when he came to power,

temporary though it was, he said that the Pentagon's priority has to be China, China, China. And this is what's driving at this point, U.S. military spending and its military preparations across the board.

I think many people here, many younger people, will know this idea that nuclear weapons are with us, that nuclear weapons are never going to be used but they exist just like the moon has been there, that it's been there for all their lives. But somehow, it's not something to worry about. Ambassador Gallhofer just told us about Colonel Petrov, but there have been many other times where there have been accidents and miscalculations. More importantly, nuclear weapons have been used many times since the Nagasaki A-bomb. They've been used during international crises and wars in the same way that an armed robber uses a gun. Whether the trigger is pulled or not, the gun has been used. In those circumstances, miscalculations, rogue activities by senior military officers, accidents, can all too easily happen. And during the Cuban missile crisis, U.S. nuclear forces in Okinawa were given an order to fire their nuclear weapons. And these kinds of things happen much too often. And most recently, the United States made such preparations and threats during its wars against Iraq. Even Obama said, "All options were on the table" in relationship to Iran, and we have Trump and his "fire and fury". But the US is not alone in this. Every other nuclear weapon state has made such threats and preparations at least once. And in the face of NATO's expansion and the pressure that the United States and NATO have placed on Russia, we have Putin saying that he's ready for another Cuban missile crisis, and that he considered using nuclear weapons in relationship to Crimea.

So we need to understand that what we're talking about is not abstract. It's very urgent, very real, very possible and we face two existential crises. So I want to move from there to the other existential crisis, obviously being climate change. I want to move from here and say, "Okay, well then, what do we do about this?"

I mean the movement here, led by Gensuikyo, led by the Hibakusha, has played an absolutely central role in developing anti-nuclear sentiment and much of the pressure that led to the ban treaty over the years. I remember Ambassador Kmentt from Austria, who was the lead organizer of the humanitarian consequences conference in Vienna. I can remember him sitting in this chair and talking with him. And he told me how deeply moved he had been by the stories of the hibakusha. This was before the humanitarian consequences conference in Vienna was in place. I was talking with the Minister earlier about Seiji Yamaguchi and his speech at the 1982 Special Session on nuclear disarmament at the U.N. So in so many ways, Gensuikyo had played a leading role; bringing people around the world to the World Conference, organizing delegations of hibakusha, including hibakusha from other countries.

So it's in this context that we are now approaching this 75th anniversary of the A-bombings. We're also approaching a period when the legitimacy of the NPT Treaty is increasingly in question. I think the expectation of most of us is that the Review Conference in 2020 will fail. Trump is unlikely to make the compromises or change in policy that are needed. And when you watch his policy in relations to Israel—moving the embassy to Jerusalem, encouraging settlements, encouraging the annexation of more Palestinian land— it is unlikely that Trump would support the calling of the Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone conference. So ahead the challenge for us is to do what we can to encourage the diplomats at the U.N. to take as strong positions as they can for disarmament, including the support to the ban.

But it's also to build the movement for the new period that we're in. And I would say the period that sees a decline in the perceived legitimacy of the NPT. And we also see that our nuclear disarmament movement, at least in countries other than Japan, are much weaker than they need to be. And there's a need to find how we can make a common cause with other movements. I made reference before to climate change. The reality is, all the senior scientists tell us that if we don't make major changes, I mean, major changes, in reducing the emission of greenhouse gases within 12 years the planet will move to irreversible climate deterioration which certainly will lead to many more wars since people move, since people are hungry but also possibly to the mass deaths of hundreds of millions of people. So we face two existential crises, some of which have common causes -- the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of power, the maintenance of privilege. And we also see that young people, maybe not in Japan, but certainly in the United States and many European countries, they see the immediate danger in climate change, but not nuclear weapons.

So what we envision in New York, is a major world conference which will have nuclear disarmament and the recognition of the 75th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the lead, but with addressing climate change, and social and economic justice up there as well, to build a much more unified movement. I was thrilled in earlier discussions to hear how many activists and hibakusha will be coming from Japan, hibakusha from Korea as well. So many that we had to find an appropriate site in New York to accommodate what we think will be somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 people. So we found Riverside Church. It's one of the largest and most prestigious churches in the United States and a proper setting for Secretary General Guterres perhaps to join us as the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon did about 10 years ago.

We want to use this event to more deeply integrate our movements and to develop the strategies that we need for the longer term -- provide a platform for the hibakusha, provide a platform for the leading critics of climate change.

But that's not all we're going to do. So we're also planning to have a mass rally, a march, the presentation of tens of millions of petition signatures to the U.N., across from the U.N. And also to say that, and Rainer Braun is as well as Gensuikyo is a principal partner in doing this organizing. But one other thing we're doing is providing a forum, a place, around which other people can take all kinds of actions. So earlier today, I was talking with our young Filipino friends and partners, and they were talking about projecting the images of 75 hibakusha onto the walls of the United Nations, onto the walls of other building in New York City -- all kinds of ways which we can build on this.

We look forward to your energy, we look forward to hosting you and we look forward to building a movement together. Thank you very much.