

# Speech for the III International Sessions

Chloé Meulewaeter

Dear Hibakushas, dear organizers, dear participants, dear friends of peace. My name is Chloé Meulewaeter. It is an honour for me to attend the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs as a collaborator of the Centre Delàs for Studies for Peace in Barcelona, as a phd student of Peace Culture at the University of Granada, and as a peace activist.

Before the world conference began, I had already had the privilege of hearing Hibakusha's testimony on two occasions. In 2015 the Peace Boat docked at the port of Barcelona, and last November it stopped near Granada. I was shocked by the horror of their experience as much as I was impressed by the strength they deploy so that the world would never again have to regret such a disaster. I welcome the incredible efforts that all of you are making to raise awareness among civil society, the media and politicians about the dangers of the atomic bomb. Thank you.

From the Delàs Center for Peace Studies, we work to denounce the dangers of the increasing militarization of our societies, which inexorably leads to suffering, human rights violations, the deterioration of the planet, and war. We participate in various international campaigns such as ICAN, GCOMS (the Global Campaign on Military Spending), and the Armed Banking, working to raise awareness among media, civil society and politics. The Centre combines the work of research and publication with divulgation and social mobilization against militarism's consequences, such as military expenditure, military R&D and the manufacture and trade of arms. Besides, it works to denounce governments' lack of compliance with the international agreements regulating these issues.

Personally, I have been working on the issue of military spending, and its relationship to the arms trade, armed conflict and global warming. The thesis we argue is that military spending is the first step in the process of militarization of a society, which we call the military economic cycle. It states that the responsibility for the facility with which military violence is committed stands in the inertia of the military economic cycle, which is based on the annual approval of the defence spending of a country. Indeed, through the demand the Army puts on the arms industry, the defence budget -and military expenditure in general- is responsible for ensuring that military industries are able to maintain sustained production and supply in the arms markets, and that arms are thus produced, exported and imported, and finally used in armed conflicts contexts.

Did you know that the latest SIPRI data estimated world military spending in 2018 at \$1,822 billion? If we counted one dollar for every second, it would take 58,000 years to reach this figure, which has never been so high in history. Indeed, over the past decades, military expenditure has drastically increased. SIPRI estimates that global military spending was US \$1005 billion in 1997 and rose to US\$ 1686 billion in 2017, which means almost 60% increase in 20 years. This figure is the highest since the end of the cold war and increases significantly after 5 years of stagnation.

As a theoretical framework, the military economic cycle provides an understanding of why military spending must be reduced to keep the possibility and probability of war at bay. Indeed,

the increase of the military spending supposes more military R&D, more arms production, more arms trade, and finally the use of these weapons, which obviously causes human disasters, but also environmental disasters. The following renewed need for arms, leads to the annual approval of public defence budget, again and again. In addition to that direct violence committed to humans and the planet, military spending generates structural violence by creating a huge opportunity cost limiting the possibility to finance disarmament policies. Limiting the opportunity to finance social policies for gender equality, education and health. The economic resources for the military cannot be allocated to policies for a culture of peace, to learn to transform conflicts in a nonviolent way. They cannot be used to mitigate climate change and foster climate resilience. Military spending is an enormous opportunity cost that prevents the financing of policies that are truly related to the security of people and the planet.

When I first redacted this speech, I was asked to share some news about the Spanish agreement to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Indeed, in September 2018, two left-wing political parties in Spain agreed to sign the Treaty if the results of the next elections would allow them to run the country. Back then we were hoping Spain would be the next European country to position itself against the inhumanity of nuclear weapons. Despite the results of the elections that would have allowed the left to govern, the negotiations between the social democrat party and the progressive party have failed. It seems now that Spain has lost a unique opportunity to sign the Treaty.

Also, in Belgium, my home country, two political parties, also left-wing and greens, have presented a bill to prohibit the presence of nuclear weapons in Belgium following a report confirming the presence of American nuclear weapons on Belgian territory. Although this information is not officially confirmed, Belgian peace movements can finally lobby to ban nuclear weapons from Belgium, and hopefully it will lead to a massive social reject of nuclear weapons.

Yesterday I was amazed to hear my colleagues speaking about climate change and its link to the military. As you know, the CO2 emissions by the military were explicitly excluded from the Kyoto Protocol in 1992, and although included in the 2015 Paris Agreement it is not mandatory for a country to reduce its military CO2 emissions. That's nonsense when the US Department of Defence itself admits that it is the world's largest consumer of oil. The military's responsibility on the threat of climate change is undeniable, and it is urgent to put this subject at the heart of our actions and research.

We have to work to build peace and provide it with the economic resources it needs, to ensure that the future is free of armed violence, and full of tools for the well-being and security of people and the planet.

As Vicent Martínez Guzmán, a Spanish philosopher who has worked all his life for peace, said, "we pacifists are the realists". And today I will add: "What is real is that the atomic bomb is inhuman. What is real is that the atomic bomb is the most despicable human invention. We, the pacifists are the realists". Thank you.