

## **2020 World Conference against A and H Bombs (online)**

### **Remarks by Izumi Nakamitsu, Under Secretary-General and United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

**6 August 2020**

Mayor Matsui  
Ambassador Hajnoczi  
Distinguished Presenters  
Ladies and gentlemen

I am, once again, honoured to participate in this event and to listen to the testimonies of the hibakusha – these courageous survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This day, commemorating three quarters of a century since the destruction of Hiroshima, is an opportunity to reflect upon the horrors of nuclear weapons, the suffering they cause, their unparalleled destructive power and the need to bring about their total elimination.

In doing so we pay tribute to the hibakusha – the human face of that suffering and destruction. For seventy-five years, the hibakusha have been living symbols of resilience and reconciliation. The voices we have heard today speak of tragedy, but they also resonate with hope – hope for a more peaceful world and a safer existence for future generations.

Since its inception, the United Nations has made the elimination of nuclear weapons a guiding mission.

This is for three primary reasons. First, nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive potential and the world's arsenals are stocked with weapons that are vastly more powerful than those used in August 1945. Second, nuclear weapons are one of the two threats, along with climate change, that extend to all life on the planet. A war involving just a handful of nuclear weapons could cause an environmental cataclysm. Finally, no country is equipped to properly respond to the humanitarian catastrophe that would result from any use of nuclear weapons.

Today, I worry that we, the international community, have not only stalled in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons, but that we are going backwards.

Over seventy-five years, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the international community has established a framework of instruments, mechanisms and agreements to prevent the use of nuclear weapons and bring about their total elimination. We developed strong shared understandings against the use of nuclear weapons and against their testing and proliferation. We saw massive reductions in arsenals and the decreasing role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines.

Yet these historic achievements are now eroding in the face of mounting antagonism between nuclear-armed rivals. Some seem to have forgotten what it was like to live with the daily dread of nuclear annihilation that characterised the darkest days of the Cold War and have even abandoned its chief lesson – that a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought. Instead, division, distrust and a lack of dialogue threaten to return the world to unrestrained strategic nuclear competition.

It is true that we face daunting challenges in finding our way back to a common path to nuclear disarmament, yet it should not be forgotten that some of the most important milestones in our collective cause were achieved during the height of nuclear-armed tension. Countries, including adversaries, found the political will to negotiate ground-breaking instruments such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, now rightly regarded as the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

I believe we can find that political will today, but to help generate it we should look to civil society.

Historically, it is the expertise, advocacy and passion contained in civil society that has fuelled collective efforts in disarmament. They have been a resource, a conscience and a driving force for issues ranging from bans on inhumane weapons such as landmines and cluster munitions to bringing an end to nuclear testing.

It was civil society, together with the hibakusha, who provided the impetus for the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons. They helped galvanize the frustration felt by many countries at the slow pace of nuclear disarmament into the negotiation of the TPNW. When it enters into force, this treaty will be a pillar of the disarmament regime.

With so many leading civil society organizations present at this event, I take this opportunity to call on all of you to redouble your efforts, to engage with each other and with the Member States of the United Nations, to reverse the dangerous trends

of the moment and to return the world to a common path for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

At the United Nations, we will continue to strive to make sure that your voices are heard, and your opinions listened to.

The current circumstances in which we find ourselves require the lessons and example of the hibakusha as much as ever. The United Nations is dedicated to ensuring that the survivors' testimony lives on and is spread to the broadest possible audience, including to younger generations – the world's future peace builders.

This last point is important because, as Secretary-General Guterres said, the world's youth have already “proved their power time and again in support of the cause of disarmament.” Their generation faces a myriad of global problems and it is incumbent on all of us to work with them now to find solutions, including to the problem of nuclear weapons.

The continued relevance of multilateralism and international cooperation depends on how we will be able to create space for youth and work with youth. At the turning point of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, I am convinced that an important element of responsible leadership is to equip young people with the necessary knowledge and skills, but also to let them innovate and to engage with them.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is ravaging individuals and societies across the world, we must come together as an international community. If the pandemic has taught us anything it is that global problems require global solutions and that our focus should be on the security of all humans.

Seventy-five years is too long a time to have spent in the shadow of nuclear catastrophe, but it is not too late to move into the light. For the sake of the survivors, let us all use this solemn occasion to recommit to the achievement of a safer and more secure world – a world free of nuclear weapons.

No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis.