

2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs
Statement by Ambassador Alexander Kmentt
President-designate of the 1st Meeting of States Parties of the
Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Distinguished delegates of the 2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs. It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this Conference again after 2014. Being in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in person at that time was a profound experience for me.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force on January 22, 2021 after the ratification of the 50th state. This is a milestone in multilateral diplomacy and a paradigm shift in international efforts to resolve the nuclear weapons problem. The first resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946 advocated the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. For the first time, the Ban Treaty now sets an international law prohibiting these weapons, explicitly based on their catastrophic humanitarian effects and the great risks that the collective practice of nuclear deterrence entails.

The increased international focus on the humanitarian dimension and risks of nuclear weapons - for example at the Vienna conference dedicated to this topic in 2014 - has shown that these effects are much more serious, complex and long-lasting than previously assumed. Such humanitarian consequences are unacceptable if only one nuclear weapon is exploded; they are unimaginable if a nuclear conflict occurs.

At the same time, the risks in connection with the possession of these weapons and the – misguided - belief in the safety and stability of nuclear deterrence are much more considerable than the public is largely aware of. These risks are not only those of nuclear escalation and conflict but also risks of miscalculations or accidents caused by technical or human errors. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons and cyber vulnerabilities of nuclear systems add further disconcerting layers of risks. Only last January, the experts of the “Doomsday Clock”, which goes back to Albert Einstein, warned that the existential risk posed by nuclear weapons is greater today than it was during the Cold War. Today there are more nuclear actors, more trouble spots and tensions with nuclear escalation potential and massive nuclear modernization programs in all nuclear states. The experts have therefore set the doomsday clock to a worrying 100 seconds before midnight.

The nuclear ban treaty follows the logic that there are no right hands for the wrong weapons, as the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon put it in 2013. The treaty is thus an essential normative supplement and further development of and complement to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which also includes an obligation to nuclear disarmament. However, more than 25 years after the end of the Cold War and 50 years after the NPT came into force, this central condition of the NPT has not been fulfilled by the nuclear weapon states. They seem unwilling or unable to take steps away from their precarious belief that nuclear deterrence can be a sustainable foundation for stability and security. This belief is to the detriment of the security of all.

The TPNW now establishes a clear prohibition norm that is directed against this weapon of mass destruction *per se*. In this way, the treaty underscores that the overwhelming majority of the international community no longer sees the nuclear status quo and the permanence of the nuclear *sword of Damocles* over the heads of all humanity as legitimate. In addition, a clear prohibition norm forms the legal basis on which actual disarmament steps can be taken and the goal of a world without nuclear weapons can be achieved. In the case of other types of weapons, from chemical weapons to biological weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, a ban under international law was first established as the basis for the subsequent elimination of these weapons.

The entry into force of the Ban Treaty is, of course, only a first step, especially as the nuclear powers are currently opposing the TPNW and not engaging with the arguments on which the treaty is based. The task now is therefore to strengthen the young treaty and its normative power. In 2017, 122 states adopted the treaty during negotiations and 55 states have already ratified it to date. Each additional treaty accession is an opportunity to demonstrate that the international delegitimization of nuclear weapons is getting bigger and clearer. The arguments about the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons and their risks are compelling and raise profound questions about the legality, legitimacy and sustainability of an approach to international security based on the threat of mass destruction. With the progressive strengthening of the treaty and the greater commitment of civil society, this line of argument will change the discourse on nuclear weapons and generate pressure to actually and seriously implement the disarmament obligations to which nuclear weapon States are bound to by the NPT.

Dear delegates and members of Japanese civil society,

Early next year, the 1st Meeting of the State Parties of the TPNW will take place. I have been given the great honour and responsibility of presiding over this meeting and facilitating its preparations. These preparations have been going very well so far despite the limitations imposed on us by the pandemic. The State parties and signatories of the TPNW have been clear that they take this conference very seriously and want to use this opportunity to put the implementation of the treaty on a strong and solid track. One very important aspect of the TPNW and a focus at the 1st Meeting of State Parties are the positive obligations of assisting victims and addressing the environmental remediation of nuclear weapons. The *Hibakusha* have played such an important role in making this a strong element of the TPNW.

We hope at the 1MSP to send a strong political message refocussing on the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons. This will be an opportunity for States and civil society to underline the importance of the humanitarian rationale of the TPNW and every participating State and civil society organisation is important to demonstrate the growing support for the treaty and for moving away from the dangerous and misguided reliance on nuclear weapons.

All States have been invited by the UN Secretary General to attend the conference. TPNW State parties will welcome the participation also of States that currently do not support the TPNW. We want and we need the engagement with those who are still sceptical and stuck in the belief of the necessity of nuclear deterrence. States can, of course, maintain that they do not want to accede to the TPNW, at least in the near term. However, there is no reason or excuse not to engage with the profound humanitarian arguments on which the TPNW rests. I certainly hope that many States that not yet support the TPNW, will therefore come to the 1st Meeting of State Parties in Vienna to participate as observers. In this context, I certainly hope that Japan will decide to participate as an observer. Firstly given Japan's historical role as the only State in which nuclear weapons were used in conflict and, secondly, because of the essential role that the *Hibakusha* have played in raising awareness and bringing the TPNW about, Japan's participation would be important. Japanese civil society can play a crucial role to make this happen. I look forward to seeing many of you in Vienna.

Distinguished delegates,

The Covid pandemic in particular has shown how vulnerable and fragile our societies are and how our collective security is in truth inextricably linked. The Covid

virus will not wipe out humanity, despite all the serious problems we are now facing. Nuclear weapons, on the other hand, do have this potential. The experts of the „Doomsday Clock have thus warned that today’s pandemic must be a wakeup call to solve the nuclear weapons conundrum once and for all.
Thank you.