

NAGASAKI UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH CENTER FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS ABOLITION (RECNA)

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“Strategies to overcome the current impasse in nuclear disarmament”

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In my former capacity as Undersecretary-general of the United Nations and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I had the opportunity to visit Nagasaki on a couple of occasions. More recently, I accompanied Secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon in his historic visit to the Peace Memorial and Museum in 2010. The memory of these visits is still strong in my mind as I find myself here once again to share with you some thoughts on the current panorama of efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament. At the same time, I cannot fail to pay homage to the memory of the victims of the fateful atomic bombing of August 9 1945, as well as to the resilience and courage of those who survived and continue to spread a message of hope and peace.

The world has not forgotten that day. A couple of weeks ago, I participated in a program at the Federal University of the city of Goiânia in my native country of Brazil to remember the suffering of those who perished from the blast and also to reflect on the need to ensure that such a tragedy will never happen again. Over a hundred *hibakusha* live today in my country.

I wish to share with you a short but poignant poem written at the time of the atomic bombings by one of Brazil’s most noted poets, Vinicius de Moraes. The poem is entitled “The rose of Hiroshima”, but it might as well be “The Rose of Nagasaki”. It was written in Portuguese, my native language, but I shall read it in English for the benefit of those who cannot follow the Japanese translation:

***“Think of those children,
Mute, telepathic
Thing of those girls
Blind, inexact
Think of those women
Tattered, altered
Think of those wounds
As warm roses
But oh, do not forget
The rose, the rose
The rose of Hiroshima
The hereditary rose
The radioactive rose
Stupid and useless
The rose with cirrhosis
The atomic anti-rose
With no color, no perfume
No rose, no nothing.”***

Several commemorative acts were held this month, mainly in the city of São Paulo, to mark the resolve of the Brazilian people to cooperate in the effort to rid the world of the last remaining category of weapons of mass destruction. The other two – chemical and bacteriological weapons – are already banned by international treaties supported by the overwhelming majority of nations. We need now to redouble our efforts to achieve the outlawing of the most cruel and indiscriminate of all weapons.

Unfortunately, the dangers of nuclear weapons are still with us. Whether by design or accident, the many thousands of such weapons that still exist in the arsenals of a few States continue to threaten the population of every nation – including the peoples of the very countries that seem to believe their security is assured by such means of mass destruction.

Civil society, including the academic community, is well aware of these dangers. Every year, at the start of the work of the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations, activists from many countries, many of them from Japan, hand to United Nations officials petitions signed by millions of citizens. They demand urgent and effective measures to ban the manufacture, possession and use of nuclear weapons, as well as the irreversible destruction of existing arsenals. Their concern is not lost in the minds of all those who have had the occasion to deal with such matters. On the third floor of the General Assembly building, there is a permanent exhibition of objects, photographs and other items that illustrate the horrors of war – particularly nuclear war – and the efforts of the international community to achieve disarmament and peace. The documents containing those petitions are exhibited to the public in an acrylic column that is now just under three meters high and was opened by the Secretary-general of the United Nations during my tenure as High Representative.

To be sure, humankind has experienced some success. Since the end of World War II a number of important treaties and agreements were successfully negotiated. The Charter of the United Nations, adopted two weeks before the first experimental nuclear detonation, calls for the elimination of “all weapons adaptable to mass destruction” and the regulation of conventional arms. In 1967, Latin America and the Caribbean succeeded in establishing the first treaty banning nuclear weapons in an inhabited region of the world – the Treaty of Tlatelolco, covering 34 nations with a combined population of over 600 million people. Other regions emulated the Latin American example. Today, the territories of 113 States are free of nuclear weapons, the wide majority in the Southern Hemisphere. In 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons set forth the basis for a regime that is largely responsible for curbing the number of nations that chose to predicate their security on nuclear weapons. From the dire predictions of the early 1960’s, when it was feared that 20 to 25 States would soon acquire atomic capability, the number of possessors of these weapons has been kept at a much lower level. These are far too many. There should be no place in the world for any nuclear-armed country.

The international community achieved other landmark agreements in the field of non-proliferation, particularly the treaties that prohibited nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in 1963, and in all environments, in 1996. The latter – the CTBT – however, is still not in force. Ratification by eight States – China, DPRK, Egypt, Iran, Israel, India, Pakistan and the United States – is required for its formal entry into force. With the exception of one State – the DPRK – these States have observed voluntary moratoria in their testing programs for almost a couple of decades. But this is not enough. Civil society and academia must continue to demand the full ratification of the CTBT and the end of tests by the People’s Republic of Korea. I have just come from a meeting of a group put together by the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO to promote this important treaty. Some scholars have suggested the revision of the treaty to permit its entry into force without the need for ratification by all holdout States.

The NPT, which entered into force in 1970, is the most adhered to agreement in this field. Only four States are not Party to it, all of which developed nuclear arsenals. The NPT recognizes five of its Parties as nuclear weapon States, with rights and obligations not shared by the rest of its members. Despite its intrinsically discriminatory character, the NPT is considered the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. In fact, none of the non-nuclear Parties to the NPT has acquired nuclear weapons; the only one that did had to leave the treaty first. A few episodes of doubts about the nature of national nuclear programs have been resolved or are being resolved through political means and negotiations within the international system.

Unfortunately, however, no significant progress has been achieved on nuclear disarmament. Article VI of the NPT calls for its Parties to seek to achieve nuclear disarmament through negotiations, a goal that so far has not been reached in the multilateral arena. In 1978 the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament established what is known as the "multilateral machinery" composed of the First Committee, which adopts resolutions on matters of disarmament and international security, the United Nations Disarmament Commission, charged with formulating recommendations to the General Assembly on specific issues, the Advisory Board, whose task is to study specific issues and make suggestions of action to the Secretary-general of the United Nations. The First SSOD also reformulated the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament as the negotiating body. Since the mid-1990's, however, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to achieve agreement on a program of work that would ensure the start of negotiations on the items on its agenda.

In all these organs, the two States possessing the largest nuclear arsenals and their allies advocate what they describe as the "step by step" method to achieve nuclear disarmament. Non-nuclear weapon States point out that since the inception of that body no disarmament agreement has ever been negotiated under its purview. All results achieved so far deal with non-proliferation. No nuclear weapon has ever been dismantled as a result of a multilateral agreement. One must recognize that the two most heavily armed States have made sporadic efforts to reduce their atomic arsenals, mainly for economic reasons. Reputable institutions tell us that since the height of the Cold War the number of nuclear warheads in the hands of the United States and Russia has decreased from about 70.000 to around 16.000. However, no independent verification systems can corroborate these claims and there is no transparency about the possibility of retired or mothballed weapons to be brought back to active service. All States possessing nuclear arsenals are spending enormous amounts of financial resources to modernize and improve the lethal capacity and accuracy of their weapons. Furthermore, none of the current possessors seems willing to accept the start of serious negotiations on irreversible, legally binding and independently verifiable measures to eliminate such weapons. On the contrary, they continue to state their intention to retain their arsenals as indispensable to their security for as long as they see fit, and to use them in the circumstances that they consider adequate.

Given these discouraging signs, the international community has been actively looking for ways to overcome the virtual paralysis of the machinery put together by the United Nations. Non-nuclear weapon States show growing impatience about this sad state of affairs in multilateral organs devoted to disarmament. Five out of the nine Review Conferences of the NPT held so far ended without agreement on a consensus Final Document. The latest, earlier this year, collapsed when the United States and the United Kingdom objected to a proposal for the holding of a Conference on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, a longstanding objective of Arab countries. Impartial observers of the international disarmament panorama are increasingly coming to the conclusion that the NPT, hitherto considered the

cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime – has exhausted its normative capacity. This does not mean that the Treaty has become obsolete or that it should simply be scraped and replaced by a less discriminatory and effective arrangement. The current reality shows that the demands of the wide majority of the international community must be taken into account with seriousness by those who have so far prevented progress in nuclear disarmament. A promising proposal is gaining ground since the 2010 NPT Review Conference, when all Parties to that Treaty agreed to record their concern over the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear detonations. Three well-attended Conferences in 2013 and 2014 refined the conclusion that the effects of the use of a nuclear weapon will not be confined by political boundaries and that there would be no adequate resources to attend to the humanitarian emergency of such an event. At the last Session of the United Nations General Assembly over 114 States – and counting – endorsed the pledge to “stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate” nuclear weapons. According to this initiative, it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again; the only guarantee against the use of such weapons is their complete elimination. This proposal had the effect of changing the current paradigm related to nuclear weapons. Instead of their significance to military postures and doctrines, it is their devastating and indiscriminate effects that are now being called into question. For several years now a proposal for the negotiation of a Convention that would ban the manufacture, development, stockpiling, possession and use of nuclear weapons has been presented to the international community. Recently, this idea evolved into a more simple call for an initial ban on the use. So far, no action was taken at the United Nations in this regard, but many organizations of civil society, including academics, devoted their attention to the study of the ways in which that proposal could be developed into a norm of international law. Even if all or some of the current nuclear weapon States or their allies choose not to join as Parties to such Conventions, the overwhelming support from the remainder of the international community might provide the necessary impetus for the “stigmatization” of nuclear weapons and pave the way for progress toward the common goal. It is of course impossible to predict the future of this novel initiative – in fact it is not so novel. Since nuclear weapons began to proliferate, many far-sighted people everywhere have called for their elimination on humanitarian grounds. Being a part of the community in a city that has experienced the use of atomic power on its civilian population, you are better qualified than anyone else to take on those that still claim that their exclusive possession of nuclear weapons is a factor of stability and peace in the world. Nothing could be farther from the truth. You must continue to promote ways to overcome the current stalemate and achieve the goal of ridding the world of the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. There is no proven strategy except a consistent effort by civil society and academics to mobilize public opinion and governments into action. This is what you are doing here today, and I wish you every success in this noble endeavor.