



UN OEWG on Nuclear Disarmament

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The second session of the United Nations' Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Nuclear Disarmament was held 2-13 May 2016 at the United Nations Office at Geneva. This follows on a resolution submitted by Mexico and others to the 70th General Assembly. The resolution, *Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments**, was approved with a recorded majority vote of 138 in favor. The OEWG is to hold three sessions this year (in February, May and August) that together are to extend over 15 working days. During the sessions, substantive talks will be held regarding "essential elements that would comprise effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons." Conclusions are to be presented as recommendations to the General Assembly this autumn. Being open to not only all UN member states but also to civil societies, NPOs and other concerned parties, the OEWG is notable for its broad range of participation, at least relative to other related UN conferences (e.g., the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT Review Conference)).

Behind the setting up of the OEWG, there is a growing trend towards a "humanitarian approach" in nuclear issues since 2010. As world citizens become increasingly aware of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, together with the risk of terroristic or accidental/mistaken detonations, countries without nuclear arsenals are becoming increasingly insistent for the erection of a legal framework that bans such weapons. And, indeed, the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons has repeatedly addressed this issue and, in doing so, did much to advance the debate. Yet, as countries on this side of the debate gain momentum, those on the other side – countries with nuclear arsenals and their political/military allies – loath such legal argumentation and are becoming increasingly resistant to it.

The May OEWG session ended up widening the gap between these two sides. While direct representatives of the nuclear powers were nowhere to be found, those



Venue of OEWG: Palais des Nations
UN Office at Geneva, Photo by RECNA, May 2 2016

governments were nonetheless strongly advocated by NATO member countries together with Japan, Australia and other countries that, while not possessing nuclear weapons of their own, do fall under a "nuclear deterrence" umbrella. Collectively, they repeated such assertions as "humanitarian issues are important, yes, but don't forget national security" and "it is a waste of time for us non-nuclear powers to be debating this issue among ourselves." In contrast, those in the nuclear prohibition camp would assert, for instance, that "we can't keep going on like this, something has to change."

Members of the latter camp – countries in favor of banning nuclear weapons – are clearly in the majority. Austria submitted and a total of 126 countries endorsed a working paper calling for the OEWG to proceed with nuclear disarmament negotiations. There is also much support for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Such a treaty would be "proactive" – ban not only the use of nuclear weapons, but also their possession, etc. – and, it is hoped, provide the international community with a model toward the abolition of such arms. Unlike comprehensive approaches that include procedural matters pertaining to the disposal of nuclear weapons (and to the verification of such disposal), negotiations for such a treaty could be advanced with or without the participation of countries that possess nuclear arsenals. Led by Mexico, ten states from Nuclear Weapons Free Zones submitted a proposal calling for a conference to be held as early as 2017 to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons.

The focus of the third session (to be held 5 and 16-19 August) is on whether or not participants will recommend that a negotiating conference be convened. The answer to this should have a significant impact on the maneuverings of countries in favor of a ban as they approach the autumn General Assembly and what comes beyond. And, as it becomes increasingly likely that a call for such a conference will indeed be on the agenda, those countries under a "nuclear umbrella" yet not possessing nuclear weapons of their own face a dilemma, for this would test just how serious they are about nuclear disarmament. Japan, of course, cannot let

such negotiations proceed without a significant degree of involvement on its part.

International debate on the prohibition of nuclear weapons is approaching its now-or-never moment.

**UN Document A/C.1/70/L.13/Rev.1 General and complete disarmament: taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations*

US President's Visit to Hiroshima and Issues for the Future

Tastujiro Suzuki (RECNA Director)

The 27th of May, 2016, is a day that will remain in history. For it is the day that Mr. Barack Obama spoke at Hiroshima, the first address ever made by a sitting US president at an atomic bombing site. Mr. Obama's day began with a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, followed by a 17-minute speech and a tour of the A-Bomb Dome under the guidance of hibakusha (bombing survivors). We look back upon this day, this day of emotion and remembrance, to examine the implications of his visit and the issues it underscores for further attention into the future.

Significance

That a sitting President of the United States visited an atomic bombing site and, by that, had some direct exposure to the reality of such a bombing is, in itself, significant. One would like to believe that this experience reinforced the conviction of Mr. Obama and others that "a nuclear weapon must never be used" and that this lesson will be taken to heart by future policymakers. It is not some idealistic dream to hope that that this experience, this conviction will be carried on to the next President of the United States and to the leaders of other nuclear powers, such that it becomes an established pattern for each leader to visit an atomic bombing site and see this reality for his or herself. If this were to happen, Mr. Obama's visit could well mark a turning point in the way in which we view nuclear weapons and the values we assign to them.

The speech

The president's speech lasted for 17 minutes, a much longer than anticipated. As we would expect, Mr. Obama spoke on a grand scale, with much lyricism and a heart-to-heart appeal to his audience. His speech was characterized by three general themes, outlined below. The first is his emphasis on the abolishment of war. Mr.

Obama stressed that war should be abolished, and disputes should be resolved not by military force but by diplomatic effort. His speech was significant not only to the world at large, but also to Japan with a pacifist constitution. The second is the dual nature of technology. Mr. Obama said, "The scientific revolution ... requires a moral revolution as well." This is a message to all humanity, and a challenge to us all. The third is that the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings must not be known as "the dawn of atomic warfare but as the start of our own moral awakening." In its spirit of universalism, this is not far removed from the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, which calls upon people to approach the issue of nuclear weapons "not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings, members of the species Man."

But, that said, what must be said here is that Mr. Obama's speech was conspicuously lacking in concrete policy proposals toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. As the president approaches the end of his term, it was hoped that he would cast a legacy with some mention of a "first step" toward a world free of nuclear weapons. He did not, leaving this as an issue remaining to be addressed.

The debate over "apology" and "justification"

In the United States as in Japan, Mr. Obama's visit was preceded by a debate over whether or not the president should "apologize" for the atomic bombing, whether or not the bombing was "justifiable." In the ultimate, these disputes come down the validity of the concept of nuclear deterrence and the viability of the choice between force and diplomacy. Note, however, that the real question is "what have we learned from the historical tragedy of the atomic bombings?"; and here, we fervently hope that the debate will eventually bring us to some conclusion on how we can assure that nuclear weapons will never be used again.

The “moral responsibility” of Japan and the United States

We cannot end our discussion by simply assessing this visit within the narrow framework of a “reinforcement of the US-Japan alliance.” The relationship is special — the one and only country in the world to have ever used nuclear weapons, and the one and only country in the world on which nuclear weapons

have ever been used. These countries are sought to fulfill their “moral responsibility” to, through conviction and faith, lead the world to a nuclear-free future. It is precisely this that hibakusha want so dearly. It is our responsibility to keep a close watch on the activities of these governments, to continually monitor their officials, and to show them the way forward.

The Determination and Faith of Dr. Mahathir

Satoshi Hirose (RECNA Vice Director)

On 28 May, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, took some time during his visit to Nagasaki to participate in a forum on peace and global affairs, there discussing his experiences and views with young generations. Dr. Mahathir served as Prime Minister over the approximately two decades from 1981 to 2003. He is particularly well remembered for his “Look East Policy,” which advocated a shift from a Western orientation to one centered on Asia, including a particular emphasis on Japan as a development model for his nation.

Even after retiring from Premiership, Dr. Mahathir has remained active on the international front, calling for the nurturing of the next generation of international leaders and actively participating in various peace-related activities. Indeed, this forum on peace and global affairs was itself organized largely at the behest of Dr. Mahathir, who expressed his wish to hold a dialogue with the next generation of Nagasaki youth as they take up the cause of abolishing nuclear weapons. Approximately 40 high school and college students, mainly living in Nagasaki, participated in the forum. They listened intently to Dr. Mahathir’s presentation

and had a lively discussion during the Q&A session.

Dr. Mahathir repeatedly stressed that countries must not resort to force to resolve conflicts between them. He underscored this point by pointing to his own experiences, telling students of how Malaysia, faced with various territorial disputes with its neighbors, peacefully resolved them through international arbitrations. And, on this aspect, he spoke highly of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and of Japan’s pacifist lineage through the postwar years. At the same time, Dr. Mahathir also voiced his concern over the current direction of Japanese national security and foreign policy. While avowing a long-standing respect for Japan and the manner in which it provided a model for the development of his own country, he also expressed apprehension over a gradual shift in Japan’s policymaking direction. He concluded by urging the young students of Japan to hold firmly to the pacifistic principles that have characterized the nation through the postwar years, personally encouraging those in attendance to do their part to protect and preserve those principles.



Dr. Mahathir discussing with young generations, Nagasaki, Photo by RECNA, May 28 2016

Dispatches from Nagasaki No.16

The Reaction in Nagasaki to President Obama's Visit to Hiroshima

Satoshi Hirose (RECNA Vice Director)

Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States, spoke at Hiroshima. It was the first time that a sitting U.S. president, representing the country that dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and another on Nagasaki, the possessor of the world's largest nuclear arsenal, had come to visit one site of the destruction. There was much interest in this visit in Nagasaki as well, the other site of the destruction. Mr. Tomihisa Taue, Mayor of Nagasaki, was one of the first to welcome Mr. Obama's decision to visit Hiroshima. The mayor expressed his hope is that this event would send a clear message to the world about the need to promote nuclear disarmament.

After the president left for the next stop on his journey, Mr. Taue added that Mr. Obama would certainly be welcome to visit Nagasaki, even as a private citizen after the end of his term, where, the mayor hoped, he would meet with hibakusha, survivors of the atomic bombing, in Nagasaki and engage in a dialogue with people active in the anti-nuclear weapon movement in that city as well. Mr. Taue stressed the importance of having leaders and top diplomats of nations around the world actually visit these sites, where they could see for themselves the "reality" of an atomic bombing.

The people of Nagasaki all pretty much spoke in favor of Mr. Obama's visit to Hiroshima, at least with regards to the visit itself. Yoshitoshi Fukahori (87), a hibakusha and now chairperson for the Committee for Photographs and Materials of the Atomic Bombing (Nagasaki Foundation for the Promotion of Peace), said this of the president: "He was not able to say it in words, but I do think he expressed his regrets for what happened then." Others include this comment by Shohei Tsuiki, an 89-year-old hibakusha: "I'm grateful that he came, and I did feel a sense of apology." (Nagasaki Shimbun, May 27).

With regards to the speech itself, some expressed dissatisfaction. Sakue Shimohira (81), a hibakusha and director of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Survivors Council, said: "Even a little would have been enough, I just wanted some word of apology" (Nagasaki Shimbun, May 27). Hideo Tsuchiyama (91), former President of Nagasaki University and a hibakusha himself, spoke of his disappointment: "[President Obama] didn't touch on concrete efforts toward the abolition of nuclear weapons." (Nagasaki Shimbun, May 28). Hayato Kawano (22), a fourth-year student at Nagasaki University who is active in the anti-nuclear-weapon movement in Nagasaki and went to hear Mr. Obama in Hiroshima, said "I really wanted him to chart some path toward nuclear

disarmament, some practical process for getting us there." (Nagasaki Shimbun, May 27).

In a 4 June public lecture on nuclear disarmament organized by the PCU (Prefecture City University) Nagasaki Council, a hibakusha had this to say: "The contents of [President Obama's] speech were wonderful. But still, he was up there talking like a commentator, without expressing any sense of responsibility as the president of a nuclear superpower." Another was particularly harsh in his assessment: "I cannot accept that President Obama brings his nuclear briefcase to the site of an atomic bombing and shows it off for all to see. It was a desecration of the memory of all hibakusha."

Generally speaking, Mr. Obama's visit to Hiroshima was favorably regarded as a "historical first step," but his speech that followed did not meet up to the high expectations for it, instead leaving behind a pervading dissatisfaction along the lines of "I wish he would've said something deeper."

Looking to the future, Mayor Taue expressed his desire that Mr. Obama also visit Nagasaki, even after leaving office, and there take the time to hold direct dialogues with hibakusha and the next generation of people working for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Terumi Tanaka (84), a hibakusha and General Secretary of the Japan Confederation of A- and H- Bomb Sufferers Organizations, while assessing the visit as "a big first step toward the abolition of nuclear weapons," is primarily interested in what happens from here, saying "now we will get to see just where this first step actually leads" (Nagasaki Shimbun, May 27). Similarly, Chisa Nishida (21), a fourth-year student at Nagasaki University and member of the committee that drafts the Nagasaki Peace Declaration, emphasizes that "this is the start line" (Asahi Shimbun, May 29), adding that what really counts is what specific policy measures will be applied toward the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons. It could be said that what the people of Nagasaki await now is not a few more words from President Obama, but rather some concrete action.



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