



The next big negotiating objective: a nuclear abolition treaty

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Distinguished mayors and delegates,

It's a pleasure and an honour to be here in Hiroshima, at the heart of the global anti-nuclear movement. I wish to thank Mayor Akiba for kindly inviting me here to speak, and the conference organizers. I couldn't imagine a nicer place to come to escape from the Australian winter for a few days.

I first learnt about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when I was eight years old. It was much more than just a history lesson. It was for me, as it has been for many others, an urgent call to action.

I couldn't believe that, despite the horrors of 1945, these weapons still exist in the thousands. Why, when we have witnessed their devastating effect, have we not yet mustered the political will to rid the world of this menace?

If this year's Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference had taken place in Hiroshima, instead of New York, the outcome might have more closely reflected what we in civil society had demanded of our governments: a clear commitment to start work now on a nuclear weapons convention.

Because, being in this city, it's not so easy to speak of nuclear weapons in abstract terms, as our leaders so often do. Being in this city, one cannot pretend that these are simply instruments of political power.

Of course, the NPT review conference has generally been described as a success. After all, consensus was reached, and the idea of a nuclear weapons convention was mentioned in the outcome document for the first time. But the reality is that many of the so-called disarmament "actions" were more like "aspirations".

This wasn't good enough in the minds of the many hibakusha who had travelled to Japan to attend the conference. And I imagine it's not good enough for the mayors in this hall. We don't want aspirations. What we want, and so desperately need, is real action now — because the price of delaying disarmament could be beyond our imagination.

For 65 years we have lived with the bomb. For 40 years the nuclear-weapon states have promised to disarm. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asked governments in May: "How long must we wait to rid ourselves of this threat? How

long will we keep passing the problem to succeeding generations?" Sorely missing from current disarmament talks is a sense of real urgency. Our task is to change that.

Just two weeks ago, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told officials involved in the negotiations on the New START treaty with Russia: "I am personally very grateful for everything you've done to move us toward our goal of a world someday, in some century, free of nuclear weapons." In some century. No this century. Perhaps not even next century. Just "in some century".

Russia's vision seems to be no different. Shortly after the NPT review conference it announced a 50-year modernization program for its nuclear arsenal. And France has said that it considers nuclear disarmament to be a centuries-long process — first we must abolish war.

I say this because the greatest mistake we could possibly make now would be to twiddle our thumbs and wait to see if the nuclear-armed nations are in fact prepared to do to what they have said they aspire to do. Because, in all likelihood, we will go to the next NPT review conference, in five years' time, and the world will be in no safer state.

It's time for people everywhere to take control of the disarmament process, to shift the focus from non-proliferation to abolition, and to build an irresistible groundswell of public support for a nuclear weapons convention. It's time to outlaw nuclear weapons, just as we've outlawed biological weapons, chemical weapons, landmines and cluster bombs.

Our message to leaders is simple: begin negotiations on a convention now. Not in a decade's time. Not after the next NPT review conference. But now. Almost two-thirds of all countries are behind our call. We saw in New York an unprecedented number express their support for an abolition treaty. This is not a radical idea. In fact, it's radical to believe that nuclear weapons shouldn't and can't be banned.

Our challenge now is to build links with national and international humanitarian, environmental and human rights groups to create a formidable global network of campaigners who are committed to prioritizing a nuclear weapons convention as the next big negotiating objective.

If we waste time, we may waste the opportunity. Let's get to work!

Thank you.