

Statement

**The Roundtable Meeting of “Forging Partnership between Religious Leaders and
Parliamentarians for Nuclear Disarmament”**

(8th May 2015)

Religions for Peace International Standing Commission on Disarmament and Security

Religions for Peace Japan

Chair, Ven. Gijun Sugitani

Dear distinguished friends, I would like to express my wholehearted appreciation to the Chair of today’s meeting for this opportunity to express my views.

First, I would like to offer my wholehearted appreciation to all the distinguished parliamentarians and religious leaders participating in the roundtable meeting entitled “Forging a Partnership between Religious Leaders and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Disarmament.” Though our time is rather limited, I earnestly hope that we have a meaningful and productive discussion on concrete steps and measures to achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, as well as ways to promote a partnership between parliamentarians and religious leaders to realize this goal through a frank and open exchange of views.

The progress of our meeting today is attracting much attention, especially in light of the worrisome contemporary international security environment, exemplified by the recent remarks of President Putin of Russia implying the threatened use of nuclear weapons, and the probability of nuclear proliferation in the Middle Eastern countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia. I expect that the final results of our meeting today will have an impact on the negotiation process among the NPT State parties attending this Review Conference, and hope to make a substantive contribution towards new developments in the quest for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

The year 2015 is turning out to be a historical turning point.

Two points about the year 2015 make it a historically critical year. First, 70 years have passed since the end of World War II on the 15th of August, 1945. Second, on the 6th and 9th of August, 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This year, 2015, marks the 70th year since the use of nuclear weapons, an unprecedented human tragedy that should never have occurred. The precious

lives of 160,000 citizens were lost in the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima 70 years ago. Furthermore, since the bombing, radiological disease has continued to take the lives of people in Hiroshima. As of the 6th of August, 2014, the number of victims of the effects of radiation stood at 292,325. The DNA of atomic bomb victims received irreversible damage, and this injury of the sensitive human genome system is passed on to future generations. The severity of this suffering is beyond imagination and clearly illustrates the undeniable inhumanity inherent in the use of atomic and nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and its advocacy of “maintaining international peace and security” and “developing friendly relations among nations in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all.” I sincerely pray that in this historically significant year of 2015, the citizens and NGOs of the countries of the world will join as global citizens to devote great energy and wisdom to realize peace and a world free of nuclear weapons, and to put together creative ideas for a feasible, yet effective roadmap toward the ultimate goal of the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

Message from “Resource Guide on Nuclear Disarmament for Religious Leaders and Communities”

Now, I would like to introduce our booklet entitled “Resource Guide on Nuclear Disarmament for Religious Leaders and Communities”, published by Religions for Peace in order to encourage religious communities to organize and promote campaigns for nuclear disarmament. A little later, Mr. Alyn Ware will give us a briefing on this resource guide, but I would like to draw your attention to a special message from Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, which he kindly contributed on the occasion of its publication. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon writes, “Religious groups in particular have enormous potential to advance nuclear disarmament worldwide. They share a broad interfaith consensus that nuclear disarmament is both necessary and a just cause. After all, peace is a core value shared by all the world’s great religions.”

On page 6 of the resource guide, Mr. Christopher Weeramantry, former Vice President of the International Court of Justice, states, “All legal systems at their formative stages of development drew heavily upon religious principles, not in the sense of the dogma, or shall we say the ritual, or the high theology of religion, but upon the basic principles of morality which were contained in that body of religious teaching.” In this regard, I believe that today’s meeting of parliamentarians in charge of lawmaking based on the principle of the rule of law, and religious leaders who subscribe to

the widely shared “Golden Rule” of “never harming others”, who have come together to discuss bold yet practicable proposals for furthering nuclear disarmament work, carries a great significance. Our gathering also fosters great expectations.

I mentioned in the Resource Guide that from its founding in 1970, Religions for Peace has consistently worked to eliminate nuclear weapons. As I wrote, complete elimination of nuclear weapons has remained one of the highest priorities of the working agenda that we have tackled since the inception of the Religions for Peace movement. Reflecting on the track record of disarmament work by Religions for Peace, I recall that at the NGO Session of the First United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in 1978, a Religions for Peace representative was given an opportunity to make a plea for disarmament as one of the international NGOs with a global network. I would like to quote here just a few lines of the demands we made to the representatives of members states. “May we, motivated by our several religions, suggest a greater sense of urgency to you, world diplomats acting to end the arms race? The danger of nuclear war by calculation, miscalculation, accident, or terrorism is increasing. We implore you to act with all deliberate speed, even incautious speed—in the words of one of our own congresses. Humanity’s continued existence on this planet is threatened with nuclear extinction. The human race must end the arms race before the arms race ends the human race. The most basic human right is survival.” Despite the passing of 37 years since this statement, the very essence of this message has increased in relevance rather than losing validity. This message is one we should take all the more seriously in our age of nuclear proliferation and ominous signs of the potential use of nuclear weapons.

Proposals from the perspective of faiths

Now, I would like to make some observations that will help make our discussion today a fruitful one. First, policy decision makers should cast off the Cold War mentality of nuclear deterrence policy. U.S. President Obama delivered a speech in Prague on the 5th of April, 2009, calling for a world free of nuclear weapons. The international community welcomed his call and it heightened expectations for progress toward the elimination of nuclear weapons. President Obama’s reception of the Nobel Peace Prize was a clear indication of the high expectations of the global community. On the other hand, in the same speech President Obama also made the following statement. “As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies . . .” After a quarter century following the end of Cold War, I

wonder: who could be the “enemy” of the state? Now, especially after the 9.11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the so called “enemy” of international peace and security is no longer the rational actor that is the nation state, but rather, non-state actors and terrorist groups. The policy of nuclear deterrence is ineffective to deter such groups.

In 2007 and 2008, four former high level U.S. officials, namely, former Secretary of State, George Shultz, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and former Senator Sam Nunn joined to call for a “world free of nuclear weapons” in a series of pieces in the Wall Street Journal. They argued that nuclear weapons were necessary during the cold war period to maintain the security of the nation. Nevertheless, the strategy of nuclear deterrence is no longer effective in our contemporary situation, where there is the prospect of North Korea or Iran coming into possession of nuclear warheads, or the possibility of weapons falling into the hands of some terrorist group. Therefore, the best way to assure the security of the United States is the advent of a world free of nuclear weapons. I remind you, these four leaders were once at the center of the national security policy making establishment and the proponents of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

We should open our eyes to the reality that in the current international environment, nuclear deterrence strategy is a legacy of the past. As a spokesperson for the wisdom of the international religious community, I would like to ask you to join with me to demand that the nuclear weapon states “build a solid foundation of solidarity that refuses succumb to the threat of nuclear weapons and to discard the policy of nuclear deterrence.” Second, I would like to stress that we must not fail to take advantage of the momentum created by the current focus on the issue of the elimination of nuclear weapons. Recently, three approaches to the elimination of nuclear weapons have drawn significant attention from the international community, especially since the 2010 NPT Review Conference. These three are, (1) efforts toward the conclusion of a treaty banning nuclear weapons, (2) emphasizing the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, and (3) demonstrating the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons. There is no need to explain the importance of these three points to those of you gathered today at this meeting. However, I would like to underscore the critical importance of recognizing the mutually inter-connected nature of these three approaches to achieving the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. We can think of these efforts as the work of creating of a new paradigm or set of norms for the movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

As for my third proposal, I would like to call on you to continue your full support for the “ARMS DOWN” Campaign which is promoted globally by WCRP (Religions for Peace) through a global network of multi-religious communities. In recent years, youth leaders and friends of religious communities throughout the world engaged in the “ARMS DOWN” advocacy campaign, calling for peace and development, and as a result, collected more than twenty million signatures from all over the world.

The “ARMS DOWN” Campaign made three demands to the international community and the world’s governments: (1) abolish nuclear weapons, (2) stop the proliferation of conventional weapons such as cluster bombs, land-mines and other small weapons, and (3) redirect 10% of military expenditures to achieve the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. This year, 2015, is the target year for the goals of the UN’s MDGs and furthermore, from next year, 2016, the campaign will be continued under the new vision of “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). I feel that this campaign to achieve SDGs’ goals by demanding the reduction and reapportionment of world military expenditures in particular, carries great significance.

In conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the asserting the impossibility of any co-existence of humanity and nuclear weapons is not only an ethical, moral and religious imperative, but the collective aspiration of humanity. Nuclear weapons are incompatible with not just human life but antithetical to all living things on this planet. Finally, I would like to reiterate from the bottom of my heart that the elimination of all nuclear weapons is the solemn responsibility of all humanity.

Even though we might encounter so-called “enemies” blocking our way to peace and security for the international community, we must first identify the root causes for the emergence of such “enemies” and try to achieve reconciliation through dialogue using the global network of WCRP (Religions for Peace), rather than resorting to the use of military force. I am convinced that today’s meeting will produce encouraging results, and I thank you very much for your attention.

