

Message from Yasuyoshi Komizo, Secretary-General of Mayors for Peace
To the UN General Assembly's Open-ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament
Geneva, 22 February 2016

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me the floor. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today as, first of all, a citizen of Hiroshima, cherishing deep in my heart, the message of *our atomic-bomb survivors—the hibakusha*. They have continued to tell the world their indescribably painful experiences of humanitarian devastation in their earnest desire that “no one shall ever again suffer as we have”. I am also speaking as Secretary-General of Mayors for Peace, an international non-governmental organization, working for a nuclear weapons free world, with a current membership of 6,991 cities, representing a combined population of over a billion people worldwide.

Based on their keen sense of responsibility to protect the safety and welfare of their citizens, increasing number of mayors are deeply concerned that, even a quarter century after the Cold War ended, nearly 16,000 nuclear warheads still exist in today's world, which is filled with violence and countless seeds of conflict. Declassified documents have revealed that the risks of inadvertent nuclear weapons use due to accident or miscalculation are quite high. We also cannot ignore the danger posed by nuclear terrorism.

Nonetheless, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence is still an integral part of international security and under such doctrine, cities have been in the target list. The failure of deterrence would victimize city dwellers again and the humanitarian and environmental consequences could be much graver. This is even more unacceptable given that these doctrines were developed without any consultations whatsoever with the citizens who live in these cities. This means that nuclear deterrence is a doctrine without representation, and city citizens have in effect become silent hostages to nuclear weapon threats. Thus we, Mayors for Peace, feel obliged to speak out. Given the catastrophic consequences of the use of even a single nuclear weapon, every State and every citizen has a stake in the total elimination of these repugnant weapons. This issue needs to be addressed immediately.

Not only can nuclear deterrence fail with unacceptable humanitarian consequences, this concept also leads to dangers of nuclear proliferation, such as problems similar to North Korea's nuclear development. Former Director General of IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei used to say that possession of nuclear weapons by nuclear-weapon states is the worst temptation to proliferate. In his words, it is like an old man with a cigar in his mouth, preaching young kids not to smoke.

Furthermore we seriously question if nuclear deterrence can offer any effective solutions to the global security challenges we face today. Emerging challenges demand new thinking and innovative approaches. In this context, we believe that the international community needs to join forces and discuss how we can address real issues. It is urgent for nuclear-weapon states and those under the nuclear ‘umbrella’ to conduct earnest dialogues to plan for their security without reliance on the concept of nuclear deterrence. Yet nuclear-weapon states continue to seek to limit the debate on nuclear disarmament to symbolic measures claiming that the security environment has not matured enough for taking bolder steps. We disagree. They should recall that past nuclear disarmament measures are taken at peaks of international tension by joint initiatives of political leaders to reach out. Now is the time for world leaders to show their decisive leadership.

In pursuit of such efforts, Mayors for Peace is today reemphasizing its firm support for the negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention, because the legal prohibition of nuclear weapons can effectively serve as a watershed towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Without such decisiveness, discussions lose clear direction. On the other hand, once world leaders have agreed on this clear direction, discussions on transparency, irreversibility, verification etc. would become technical issues to settle.

In this endeavor, world leaders can also count on the important role and commitment of civil society in nurturing better conditions for political leadership by striving to overcome mutual distrust and by cultivating a shared awareness of belonging to one human family, regardless of cultural, religious and ethnic differences. We, Mayors for Peace, will continue to engage ourselves and support initiatives to create an atmosphere conducive to accelerate progress towards nuclear abolition. We also believe that progress in nuclear disarmament will help improve the general political climate to settle other international challenges and to achieve peace.

For the purposes of this Open-Ended Working Group, Mayors for Peace urges its participants to recognize the vital importance of advancing nuclear disarmament. While we see the absence of nuclear-weapon states in this February session, we hope and expect that they will constructively engage in the deliberations of future sessions. And we strongly recommend that the final outcome of your deliberations will underscore the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and identify effective legal measures to advance to the world free of nuclear weapons.