An Urgent Call for the Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

Speaker: Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima

The human family is entering the final stages of a crucial decision-making process. We have been considering for fifty years, and especially since 1989, the following question. Will we eliminate nuclear weapons or will every capable nation seek to have its own? In 1998, India and Pakistan decided that they need nuclear weapons to ensure their independence. There are 35 countries in the world with significant nuclear energy programs but without nuclear weapons. If even a few of these become nuclear powers, the nuclear disarmament option would virtually vanish and the chances of nuclear weapon use would increase. The present leadership of the United States is pursuing the development of small, "useable" nuclear weapons, and has publicly reserved the right to use them in such specific situations as "in the event of surprising military developments." The difference in the US approach to Iraq versus North Korea only strengthens the conviction of some nations that the only hope for independence lies in possession of nuclear weapons.

We stand today on the brink of hyper-proliferation and perhaps of repeating the third actual use of nuclear weapons. As the mayor of Hiroshima, I can assure you that the path we are walking leads to unspeakable violence and misery for us all. And as the mayor of Hiroshima, I am well aware that we must do more than talk about this danger. For over fifty years, mayors of Hiroshima have been raising the alarm about nuclear weapons. For 30 years, this august body has been fine-tuning the wording and debating the implications of the NPT. Hiroshima celebrated in 2000 when the final document that emerged from the review conference included an "unequivocal undertaking" on the part of nuclear-weapon states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. And yet, we are forced to conclude that the United States, the prime mover in all things nuclear, relentlessly and blatantly intends to maintain, develop and even use these heinous, illegal weapons.

Given US intransigence, other nuclear-weapon states cling to their weapons, and several non-nuclear-weapon states appear to be reevaluating the need for such weapons.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon the rest of the world, the vast majority of the international community, to stand up now and tell all of our military leaders that we refuse to be threatened or protected by nuclear weapons. We refuse to live in a world of continually recycled fear and hatred. We refuse to see each other as enemies. We refuse to cooperate in our own annihilation.

Almost immediately after the atomic bombing, most survivors performed a miraculous feat of psychological transformation. They channeled their pain, grief, and rage away from any thought of revenge and toward creating a world in which no people anywhere need suffer their fate. Having witnessed the ultimate consequence of animosity, they deliberately envisioned a world beyond war in which the human family learns to cooperate to ensure the wellbeing of all. In fact, they believed for decades that the human family was evolving slowly but steadily in that direction.
Now, however, they see that those who stand to lose wealth, prestige and control in a peaceful world are determined to maintain high levels of fear and hatred. They see gullible publics being persuaded that only a powerful military backed by nuclear weapons can protect them from their enemies. They see the world diving headlong toward a militarism far too reminiscent of the militaristic fascism that commandeered their nation prior to World War II.

We cannot sit silently watching it happen. We must let our leaders know, first and foremost, that we demand immediate freedom from the nuclear threat. Nuclear weapons are heinous, cruel, inhumane weapons that threaten our entire species. Nothing could be more obvious than the illegality of these weapons, and they should obviously be banned. Therefore, on behalf of the human family, we demand a complete and total ban on all nuclear weapons everywhere. We demand that all nuclear weapons be taken off of hair-trigger alert immediately and all nuclear weapons deployed on foreign territory be withdrawn. We demand that no more time be wasted postponing or extending the timeline for nuclear disarmament. It is high time for all recognized nuclear-weapon states to join in a multilateral process of nuclear disarmament. We further demand that de-facto nuclear-weapon states terminate their programs and join the NPT as non-nuclear states.

We demand that all nuclear weapons be dismantled and destroyed and the radioactive material disposed of as quickly and as safely as possible, with concomitant dismantling of all dedicated delivery systems, production facilities, test sites, and research laboratories. We demand that all nations throw their doors unconditionally open to UN inspectors mandated to, ensure that all nuclear weapons and all programs to make such weapons are accounted for and dismantled. All states should declare all relevant activities and make their own satellites and other national technical means available to those inspectors. Citizen verification should be supported by domestic laws requiring publication of relevant information and granting of full legal protection to whistle-blowers.

To summarize, we demand here and now that, when the States Parties review the NPT in 2005, you take that opportunity to pass by majority vote, regardless of any nations that may oppose it, a call for the immediate de-alerting of all nuclear weapons, for unequivocal action toward dismantling and destroying all nuclear weapons in accordance with a clearly stipulated timetable, and for negotiations on a universal Nuclear Weapons Convention establishing a verifiable and irreversible regime for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

"Impossible," some will say. "The nuclear powers will never agree." But just as plants can get along fine without human beings, people are ultimately the power behind their leaders. The time has come for the people to arise and let our militarist, competitivist leaders know where the real power lies. The time has come to go beyond words, reason and non-binding treaties. The time has come to impose economic sanctions on any nation that insists on maintaining nuclear weapons. The time has come to use demonstrations, marches, strikes, boycotts, and every nonviolent means at our disposal to oppose the destruction of millions of our brothers and sisters, the destruction of our habitat and the extermination of our species. The time has come to fight, nonviolently, for our lives.
All of us in this room today, blessed with extremely high levels of prosperity and education, are duty-bound to educate the rest of the population in our countries about the nuclear danger. We must inform them and mobilize them for their own protection. It is our responsibility to launch a massive, grassroots campaign that will make it clear that the people of all nations will accept only leaders who undertake unequivocally to eliminate nuclear weapons.

"The military industrial complex is too powerful," some will say. I have no illusions about what happens when the people seek to correct their rulers. It took a hundred years and a terribly bloody war to free the slaves in the US, then another century to free them from the terror of lynchings and the humiliation of segregation. It took 30 years for Gandhi to free India from British rule. It took 15 years to stop the Vietnam War. Bottom-up change takes time and great sacrifice, but, unfortunately, people of moral and spiritual vision must again take up the struggle. The abolition of nuclear weapons is no less important and no less just than the abolition of slavery. We are not just fighting a technology or a weapon. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, we are fighting nuclear weapons in our own minds. We are fighting the very idea that anyone could, for any reason that he feels legitimate, unleash a nuclear holocaust. We are fighting the idea that a small group of powerful men should have the capacity to launch Armageddon. We are fighting the idea that we should spend trillions of dollars on military overkill while billions of us live in dire, life-threatening poverty.

Our immediate target is nuclear weapons, but our long-term aim is a new world order. In this new world, no man is foolish enough to kill or be killed to defend his master's wealth or ego. We seek a world in which no man, woman or child goes to bed wondering whether he or she will live through the hunger, pestilence, or violence of the next day; a world in which we look around this room and see not murdering, thieving enemies against whom we have to defend ourselves but brothers and sisters on whom our own safety, security, survival and enjoyment depend.

You will soon be hearing about a new campaign to abolish nuclear weapons. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, supported by the World Conference of Mayors for Peace, which represents 539 cities and over 250 million people around the world, will work with anyone willing and everyone to help design, develop, and implement this campaign. Please help join us. Please support the campaign in any way you can. Let us work together for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Let us ban nuclear weapons in 2005.