

United Nations NGO Special Session
Devoted to Disarmament

(New Realities: Disarmament, Peacebuilding and Global Security)

April 20, 1993

Address by Takashi Hiraoka

Mayor of Hiroshima

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I am Takashi Hiraoka, the mayor of Hiroshima, a city destroyed by the first atomic bombing in history 48 years ago on August 6, 1945.

As the opening speaker at this U.N. NGO Special Session Devoted to Disarmament and on behalf of the citizens of Hiroshima, it is indeed a great honor for me to have the opportunity to convey our fervent hope for the creation of world peace. Through our discussions on New Realities: Disarmament, Peacebuilding and Global Security we will begin embarking down the path toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, a journey for which we all must surely long.

Though the world is finally free of the bonds of the cold war bipolar confrontation that lasted for more than 40 years following World War II, it is still undeniably held captive by the 'nuclear age,' which dawned with the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The elimination of intermediate nuclear forces and the signing of the START II Treaty between the United States and Russia seem to herald the start of a trend toward disarmament. In fact, however, there are sufficient numbers of these inhumane weapons of mass destruction on our Earth to annihilate the human race instantaneously. As evidenced by the difficulties of managing nuclear weapons in the wake of the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the world still faces the threat of these weapons.

The revelation that South Africa did at one time possess nuclear weapons has created further uncertainty in an already grave situation, not to mention that over ten other countries are now either planning to develop or are developing nuclear weapons. We, the citizens of Hiroshima, hereby express our concern regarding this trend toward the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, a process which can only invite crisis. The continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons and outbreak of regional conflicts that has followed the conclusion of the cold war indicate the dire need for us to consider seriously how to reach the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

When considering the reality surrounding nuclear weapons, I feel compelled to mention the issue of whether to extend the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a decision we will face in two years hence. In my opinion, the NPT will serve only to entrench the inequality that exists between the countries with nuclear weapons and those without. I believe the resulting disparity in military strength between these two groups will lead to either

further discontent or to secretive military expansion — both so very far from Hiroshima's goals.

If the nuclear powers view the extension of the NPT as a step toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, I want to emphasize that we must, at the same time, strengthen our resolve to eliminate these weapons by declaring our intent never to use nuclear weapons and implementing an immediate and comprehensive ban on their testing.

The most important lesson that we can take from the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is that humankind cannot coexist with nuclear weapons. Today, we not only have nuclear superpowers, but also numerous other countries striving to follow in their footsteps, due to a deeply rooted mindset that relies on military power to gain advantage in the global community. The nuclear powers flaunt the mighty force of nuclear weapons under the banner of advanced military technology and use it to intimidate other countries, holding fast to the theory of nuclear deterrence. It cannot be overlooked that seeds of mistrust between nations are sown as a result.

In the 40 years since the end of World War II, it has been demonstrated that the military arms race is completely bankrupt. The long-running nuclear arms buildup with its many nuclear weapons tests and dangerous waste, however, is creating ever more victims of radiation and wreaking ever more destruction upon the global environment. The time is now to protect the environment in which we live from the evil of both war and nuclear weapons.

In our world today, where advanced transportation and communication have led to increasing interdependency, it is terribly unfortunate that so much mistrust abounds. We must now convince our governments to restore international relationships based on mutual trust, not to mention solidarity among people of all nations.

Above and beyond the mutual acceptance of other ethnic groups, religions and cultures, we must begin our task by completely doing away with enmity and malice — not by confrontation but by working together.

Last year in June at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues held in Hiroshima City, I made several proposals. I asked that all information related to nuclear weapons be made public; nuclear testing be immediately and comprehensively banned; and the 4th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament be held in 1995 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs. I

also submitted that Hiroshima City is prepared to support a center where meetings concerning confidence-building measures among neighboring countries can take place. I once again strongly request that the United Nations and the governments of countries around the world deliberate seriously upon these proposals to ensure that they are put into practice.

We must take advantage of the power of international opinion which favors eliminating nuclear weapons and find support for these kinds of peace proposals from the United Nations and governments of countries throughout the world. To all the U.N. NGO representatives here today, I ask for your help in ridding our governments of any feelings of mistrust, enmity and confrontation. Possibilities for deepening mutual understanding among neighboring countries include exchanging exhibits of materials related to war and peace or investigating ways to develop regional non-nuclear governmental policies. There are a myriad other possibilities for NGOs based on the actual conditions of regions and groups you are addressing.

Toward this end, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will host the 3rd World Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-city Solidarity on August 6~9, the 48th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We have already received notification that representatives of cities from over 50 countries will attend the conference, where the theme will be what the cities of the world can do toward the creation of world peace. Many daunting problems still face us, including poverty, violence and the oppression of human rights. The purpose of this conference is to discuss how best to transcend national borders to work together and begin overcoming these problems from a global point of view, in turn creating a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Reverend Phillip Noel Baker, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient who paid many visits to the city of Hiroshima once said, "The great intelligence of human beings created the evil of atomic weapons. The attitude of many of our politicians who claim that the fear of nuclear and hydrogen weapons prevents conventional wars is a mistake, nothing but a meaningless myth. It's clear that humans have the responsibility to do away with what they have created."

I am reminded of a 64 year old A-bomb survivor forced to live in pain every day for 48 years. Medical science could do nothing to relieve his misery. He said to me, "Because of a single atomic bomb, we survivors have been robbed of our bodies, spirits and souls. We cannot even live like human beings."

As this person's story exemplifies, the ones who suffer most from war, not to mention nuclear war, are innocent civilians, as history teaches time and again.

The year 1995, two years from now, will mark the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as that of the end of World War II. I have repeatedly implored the United Nations to hold the 4th Special Session of U.N. General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament in this year, continuing from the last session held in 1988.

Now, as the 21st century draws near, I wonder if the people who have experienced war are sufficiently educating the next generation about their experiences. In order to pass on a bright world to posterity, we must not be afraid to talk about the darkness of times past.

In order to build a solid foundation of peace, let us collect all the wisdom of our citizens. We must continue to have faith in the power of public sentiment.

Thank you very much.