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World Conference against A & H Bombs

Hiroshima and Nagasaki August 2011

Dear participants, dear friends,

We are gathered at this international conference convened each year by the Japan Council against A and H bombs, the Gensuikyo, to commemorate the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 66 years ago, to take stock of the world situation regarding nuclear weapons and to strategize for our common goal: a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Representing the International Peace Bureau at the conference, I would like to start by thanking Gensuikyo for the invitation and for the longstanding cooperation between Gensuikyo and the IPB. Prominent members of Gensuikyo, Mr Terumi Tanaka and Ms. Yayoi Tsuchida, are active and highly respected members of the IPB Board. They spare no efforts in keeping the nuclear issue high on the agenda of IPB.

At the same time I would like to pay respect to the Hibakusha, who continue through their testimonies, to share with us the horrors they lived through in 1945, and their suffering which continues to this day. A small book reached me some years back; it was written by women survivors who were classmates back then and who only met after 50 years to talk about what they had experienced and had kept mainly for themselves for so long. For me this became an eye-opener in relation to the psychological after-effects of the disaster.

Being in Hiroshima, the city, that with Nagasaki, will forever be remembered as the location of the most terrible act of warfare, something that should never happen again, I would like to take this occasion to compliment the former Mayor of Hiroshima, Mr. Tadatoshi Akiba, for the way he managed to rally so many cities under the umbrella of the organization Mayors for Peace, an organization who, like Nihon Hidankyo, have received the IPB's own peace award, the Sean MacBride prize. I would equally like to greet the new Mayor, Mr. Kasumi Matsui, and wish him full success in his endeavours, not least as President of Mayors for Peace, now the world's biggest organization working against nuclear weapons with almost 5000 member cities, representing nearly one billion people.

Japan has experienced this year another type of nuclear disaster, and the population is living in a situation of uncertainty. This is linked both to the effects of the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown, and to a vigorous national debate regarding the viability of nuclear power – not least related to this country with a relatively high risk of earthquakes and tsunamis.

The international peace movement has had a clear and common stand over the years as to nuclear weapons, but has expressed diverse opinions as to nuclear power. IPB, with some 320 member organizations, has also until recently chosen to concentrate efforts mainly on the banning of nuclear arms, leaving the issue of nuclear power and its dangers to other, more environmentally-focused groups. While there is still a range of views, the Fukushima disaster has helped to swing the balance of opinion within the organisation against nuclear power and to highlight the important linkages between nuclear power production and weapons.

These differences of opinion may ultimately relate to the very definitions of peace that we employ. Most of us define peace in broader terms than the mere absence of war, however important that is, and we consider that the ultimate goal of our peace work is to preserve, enhance and enrich life itself – in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to such a definition of peace, nuclear power, with its capacity for endangering nature, mother earth herself and all living beings, must be considered very dangerous. Consequently, the use of nuclear power should be restricted as long as we have guarantees neither for the safe preservation of the waste nor to prevent the misuse of nuclear power (or power plants) by terrorists. Besides, as we know, there is no guarantee against natural disasters and sometimes it is also difficult to prevent so-called “man-made natural disasters”.

Some people will remain with the pragmatic opinion that we are not capable of maintaining a modern way of life without nuclear power. The rest of us will have to argue for far greater investment in renewable sources of energy, including support for infant alternative-energy industries and research, and to campaign for simpler life styles with less consumption.

Perhaps the time is ripe, with the financial crises in many parts of the world, and a fatigue among ordinary people as regards mainstream political priorities, to again bring to the forefront some of the dreams and visions of a world without war, too often referred to as vain utopias. We know from previous campaigns – for example those against slavery, colonialism, racial or gender apartheid and even cigarette smoking - that when enough people are willing to spend their time, energy and creativity on a given cause, laws, structures and practices do change.

IPB's most important project over the last few years focuses on Disarmament for Development. If we look at the resources used for military purposes, the latest figures from SIPRI (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) show that the world's military costs are even higher than during the peak period of distrust, the so called cold war period. The annual total is now 1.6 trillion US dollars– out of which some 100 billion a year are devoured by the nuclear weapons industry for weapons whose use should be totally ruled out on military, political and moral grounds. Between 10 and 20 percent of these almost 1.6 trillion dollars a year would be enough to meet the Millennium Development Goals agreed to at the UN in 2000 by all world leaders. Despite the disappointing progress in halving the world's poverty, hunger, illiteracy, AIDS and child mortality rates by 2015 and in providing better basic health care, improving maternal health and bridging the gender gap in opportunities, hardly any government seems to be ready to use this enormous heap of military money for development purposes.

It remains a paradox that the world seems to be ready to pay for war but not for peace. It is therefore a huge task for the peace movement – for us all - to reach out to people

with these figures and to motivate their engagement. We need all heads, hands and hearts available in a joint effort to promote a major change in priorities: to put what is common to us all - the truly human - up front.

IPB continues its long-standing cooperation with its many member organizations and other partners specializing in the fight against nuclear weapons, such as the International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Abolition 2000, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, and the specialist organisations of doctors, lawyers and scientists. These many civil society umbrella groups and campaigns guide the way and inspire new efforts in the abolition struggle. IPB's recent book "Nuclear weapons - at what cost?" should be seen as a useful tool in this context.

Please allow me in this context to quote from the politician, author and anti-nuclear activist Douglas Roche, who among achievements, is the co-founder of the Middle Powers Initiative. He is the candidate that IPB has put forward this year for the Nobel Peace Prize. Recently he undertook a world tour to promote his publication "How we stopped loving the bomb" and to talk with politicians and peace activists about the possibilities for achieving a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Amb. Roche is convinced that the world is moving into a new stage in the long quest to eliminate nuclear weapons. Weakened government ideology in support of nuclear weapons is now colliding with chronic deficits and other economic realities that make them unaffordable. "In addition", he says, "the intellectual case for nuclear deterrence is crumbling and for the younger generation a globalized outlook is more attractive than a nationalist one. Even in NATO headquarters in Brussels, where his arguments for nuclear disarmament in past visits were greeted by the derisory comment, 'mission impossible', the response this time could be characterized as 'mission maybe'".

Yet, as long as we continue to have these tremendously dangerous bombs and as long as there is no truly safe way to protect either nuclear arsenals or nuclear waste, the weapons may be used again. IPB intends in any case to continue to oppose NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, which violates international law and actually encourages proliferation by other states, and to condemn the first-strike doctrine.

The International Peace Bureau successfully organized this spring the first-ever Global Day of Action on Military Spending, with partners in 35 countries. This is a major element in our Disarmament for Development work. We do hope that many more will join hands next year, in a strong manifestation in favour of a drastic reduction in military spending worldwide. Enough of misguided national pride and distrust of "the other", enough of ego trips and testosterone-full manifestations, enough of lazy and blinkered thinking! We need to act strategically to inspire a process leading to a new humanistic renaissance.

There is no time right now to enter into geopolitical reflections on the challenges involved in making a universal, verifiable and enforceable legal ban on nuclear weapons. We need to help the different countries and pressure groups to create a powerful process, a collective preparatory work that will open the political possibilities.

The role of the US and Russia that hold the lion's share of the 20,000 nuclear weapons in existence, is of course vital. For Russia, US plans for a missile defense system in Europe along with other aspects of American military dominance, such as the weaponization of

space, are huge impediments to further disarmament. Governments, even those in non-nuclear European states, make excuses for resisting collaborative efforts for a global ban on nuclear weapons. And it is in Asia that military tensions are the most acute. During my work assignment for UNESCO in Pakistan, I witnessed the pride of many people in their bomb and the importance they gave it in the conflict with India.

Yet the new START treaty is (in part at least) encouraging, so was President Obama's famous anti-nuclear speech in Prague, and next year there are plans for a major conference with a view to achieving a nuclear free zone in the Middle East. There are both senior officials and politicians in all countries who would like to see a change. We in the peace movement need to reach out to these potential partners. We need to be even more vocal and convincing when stating that the world has neither the money nor the time to continue this utterly vain and obsolete stockpiling of means of mass destruction. If we have managed to ban chemical and biological weapons, we can surely ban also nuclear arms.

No country and no citizen of a country should be any longer allowed to feel pride in being military strong. The really strong countries are those who manage to create security by non-military means and use their resources to build a true culture of peace. Having had the great opportunity to work for a culture of peace in UNESCO, I must stress two issues. Firstly, the importance of peace education, including both human rights and disarmament education, in schools and through mass media. We need to build love in the minds of young people, love both for this wonderful planet of ours and for human beings in their diverse forms and colours; and secondly we should stress the important role that women can and do play for peace and for the survival of the planet, often enacting an alternative type of rationality – the rationality of care. Most women are strong in their protection of children and the weak. They want children to be born into this world without the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have shown concern and given comfort to the many families in my small country Norway, hit just recently by the murdering of around 80 people and the maiming of many more by a madman. His two targets were: young engaged people in a political summer camp, and the very heart of the government. Norway, as well as many other countries, may well have been too concerned with Islamic fundamentalism since 11. September 2001 and given less attention to other extremist groups. They usually recruit from the broad group of young frustrated men who neither find a foothold nor feel useful in post-modern societies, often de-linked from traditional working life and familiar social patterns. Luckily the reaction in Norway has not been to call for more military and more control, but to rally around the values of an open democracy – insisting on upholding the close links between politicians and people and on the importance of freedom of speech, allowing young people to express themselves openly, even in highly controversial terms.

Let me end by quoting a young survivor from the attacked summer camp. She said: "When we see how much damage one man can do out of hatred, imagine how much we, together, can do by love".

Thank you for your attention.

