

Two Minutes to Midnight
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We, the Japanese People, Will Choose the Road to Achieve a
Nuclear-free, Peaceful Japan

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I want to express my gratitude to the organizers for sponsoring this conference with the very timely topic, as well as the opportunity to speak before you. Taking this opportunity, I want to congratulate Prof. Noam Chomsky for receiving the Sean MacBride Peace Prize. Adding to a number of his very brilliant achievements, Mr. MacBride took up the “Illegality of Nuclear Weapons” as a major campaign for the IPB in the midst of the “Cold War”, and helped the Hibakusha, the A-bomb survivors and the movement against A and H bombs in Japan in the effort to make known to the world the truth of the damage and suffering from the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Ban and the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons Represents the Major Trend of the World

Along with the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means, the task of prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons formed the very starting point of the post-World War II politics, and even at present it is a vital task for the survival of the human race. While we face the danger of threat and use of nuclear weapons, it is important to confirm that the abolition of nuclear weapons represents the major trend of the time, representing the voices of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world. Those who are driven in a corner, both morally and in the width of the public support, are the pro-nuclear forces, not us.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) adopted by the UN conference last July with the support of 122 countries has been signed by 58 countries and ratified by 9 since it was opened for signature on September 20, 2017. The resolution to promote the signing and ratification of the treaty, adopted by the UNGA last December, was supported by 125, as against 39 opposition votes. The thirty-nine is not a small number, but of them 28 are NATO members mainly in

Europe, and a few others are also US allies, such as Japan, Australia and Israel. Japan's opposition is truly regrettable. As the only country to have suffered from nuclear disaster in the world, it should have taken the lead in the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Yet the global trend supporting the abolition of nuclear weapons is already irreversible. The time and reason are on our side.

The recent agreement between the North and South Korean leaders to set the reunification of the Korean peninsula, formal end of the Korean War and the establishment of peace and the denuclearization of the peninsula as their common goal is another evidence of it. Though the future path will not be an easy one, what changed the course of the problem are the diplomatic efforts of the governments concerned for the peaceful settlement of the problem, plus the principle of denuclearization, supported by a broad range of international opinion. It is thus amply clear that the anachronistic policy to rely exclusively on military threat, including nuclear blackmail, and reject the dialog as "a waste of time" has failed miserably.

Revision of Article 9 is a Road to War, a Challenge to the Global Order of Peace

Japan is the only country where people suffered the calamity from the A-bombings. Article 9 of its Constitution declares the renunciation of war, the non-possession of forces or any other war potentials, and the negation of the right of belligerency, based on its reflection on the past war of aggression.

Nevertheless, the Japanese Government opposed the TPNW, while talking about its role to bridge between nuclear and non-nuclear states. In terms of the denuclearization of Korea, it kept saying that holding dialog is a waste of time. When President Trump threatened North Korea by saying "all options are on the table", Prime Minister Abe communicated his "high appreciation" to Trump, and when he had talks with Korean President Moon Jae-in during the period of the Pyeongchang Olympic Games, Abe tried, shamelessly, to place pressure to urge Korean President not to postpone the Korean-US military exercises scheduled shortly after the Olympic Games.

Underlying these blatant words and conducts is his ambition to make Japan the so-called first-tier nation that will serve and participate in the US-led wars, by fanning fear of China and North Korea taking advantage of the tension over the issues of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or latter's nuclear development, changing the interpretation of Article 9 to enable the exercise of the right of collective self-defense,

and now expressly changing Article 9 to recognize the “Self-Defense Forces” as formal military.

At the time when he was the secretary general of the governing Liberal Democratic Party, Abe visited the neocon think-tank American Enterprise Institute in April 2004, and pledged that Japan would play active role in the US-led global security policy, and that to this end, he would change the Japanese Constitution.

His ambition is also linked to the dark past of the Japanese conservative politics, in which his forerunners had played a leading role in Japan’s aggression against Asia. Many of them were arrested as class-A war criminals when the war ended, but saved from prison by the US occupation forces. They thus came back to the top of Japanese politics without any sincere self-reflection on Japan’s past aggression or any outrageous crimes committed against Asian people. I think that herein lies the fundamental reason for them and their off-spring politicians to keep hating other Asians, detest the Constitution and particularly its Article 9, relying on the US “nuclear umbrella”, and abandoning independent diplomacy based on the Constitution, and even sacrificing the very security of their own people of Japan.

Yet, note that the Japanese people do not stay inactive on this state of the country, nor on Abe’s politics that runs counter to the Constitution and the international rule of peace.

Joint Action of Citizens and Opposition Parties, Okinawan Campaign and Nationwide Cooperation for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

In the Japanese Diet, the advocates of the revision of the Constitution occupy the two-thirds of the seats in both Houses, the number needed to initiate the process of changing the constitution. Their position was secured through the manipulation of public opinion, use of the fear of “external threat”, extremely unfair election systems in favor of ruling parties, and money from the establishment and pork-barreling. It is not fairly reflecting the will of the voters, just like here in the U.S.

Yet, a steady stream of change is going on in favor of peace and against nuclear weapons. One remarkable change is a development of cooperation between various citizen groups and opposition parties on both national and local levels calling for constitutional democracy, peace and elimination of corruption, against the government’s violation of the Constitution using the force of Parliamentary majority and repeated scandals and despotism.

The waves of such cooperation, which brought one hundred thousand people to the front gate of the Diet Building in protest against the War Laws in September 2015 spread also in defending the Constitution, protest actions against rampant government corruptions, demand for the switch away from nuclear energy, etc. In Okinawa, where local people united against the construction of a new US Marine Base and won the gubernatorial election in 2014, the next election for the governor will be fought in November this year. Okinawans are united beyond the difference of thought, belief and affiliation in support of incumbent governor. I hope that you, the US peace movement will warmly support them, as you did last time.

All these actions are bearing fruit. On or around May 3, the Constitution Day, media conducted opinion polls. Asahi Shimbun's poll results say that the revision to expressly write the Self-Defense Forces in Article 9 is supported by 39%, while 53% opposes the revision. Asked if the revision be made during Abe's tenure of office, 30% says "Yes", but 58% said "No". According to the poll by NHK, a major TV station, conducted in April, some 70% of the answers said that they appreciate Article 9 positively, while 13% said either not or hardly appreciate it.

In the movement against A and H bombs, the trend of cooperation is spreading in joint signature campaign at the grassroots. In response to the call by the leading Hibakusha for a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons issued in April 2016, many citizen groups working for different issues formed local networks to run joint signature campaigns now in 26 prefectures out of the total of 47. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even mayors and a governor joined in the street campaign, making speeches and collecting signatures from their citizens. The number of local assemblies that passed resolutions calling on the national government to sign the TPNW has now reached 259, out of the total of 1741 municipalities.

In coming August, we will convene the 2018 World Conference against A and H Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the common theme of the "Nuclear Weapon-free, Peaceful and Just World". To build even a wider cooperation to achieve a Japan that will work against nuclear weapons and abide by Article 9 will also be our motto. We have already started a variety of actions. Our peace marches started on May 6 from Tokyo to Hiroshima and from northern end of Hokkaido to Tokyo. I bet that in August, you will witness many more changes and fruits of our activities.

I look forward to meeting you then in August in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.