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By Douglas Roche

President Obama's visit to Hiroshima May 27 hits a special nerve with me because I am an Honorary Citizen of Hiroshima.

In 2010, Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba conferred this honour on me for my work through the years on nuclear disarmament. I was sixteen when the first atomic bombs were dropped by the U.S. on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945. It was only years later, on my first visit to Japan in the mid-1970s, that the horror and scale of the destruction made a lasting impression on me. Seeing Hiroshima changed my life.

Now, for the first time, a sitting President of the United States will visit the city whose name is synonymous with nuclear destruction. A controversy has been ignited over just the announcement, with many fearful that Obama will "apologize" to the Japanese for using the bomb against them. The fight over this issue reflects the larger controversy that has never been resolved: should the U.S. have used the new weapon?

Obama will not apologize. To do so would de-stabilize his presidency and galvanize his opponents, who already think his foreign policy is not muscular enough, to launch impeachment proceedings. Rather, the president will focus on the future, enlarging on his famous 2009 Prague speech for which he has already won the Nobel Peace Prize, committing the U.S. "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.'

But that doesn't mean the president won't look back. In fact, he must recall, from the steps of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, the sheer horror of the scale of nuclear destruction to awaken the political systems everywhere to the need for action to eliminate, once and for all, the most terrible weapons ever invented.

For too long, the technocrats have had their way on the nuclear disarmament issue, bamboozling politicians and the public with their jargon about the different classes of nuclear weapons. The legal and moral case against nuclear weapons has been overshadowed by those who hold that the military strategy of nuclear deterrence is essential to global security. In the past few years, a humanitarian movement has sprung up, embracing both governments and civil society, which makes clear the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences" of the use of any nuclear weapon.

The strength of this growing movement was on display in Geneva earlier this month when scores of states joined in a call for negotiations to begin in 2017 on a ban on nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons states, all of which are modernizing their nuclear arsenals (there are more than 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world), boycotted these meetings.

So here is Obama going to Hiroshima to plead the case for the elimination of nuclear weapons while his own country jumps into a new era of nuclear weaponry and refuses to participate in U.N.-sponsored efforts to start comprehensive negotiations toward elimination. Does this make any sense?

Yes, it does when you consider exactly what Obama is up against. He won the admiration of huge numbers of people when he challenged the

world to move towards elimination of nuclear weapons even if the job couldn't be done in his lifetime. But the very institutional machinery the president is supposed to control in his own country wouldn't budge. It was President Eisenhower who first railed against the power of the military-industrial complex, and these lobbyists for military strength have only grown stronger since then. Obama is forced to fly above his own bureaucracy.

The only thing the president has left is his bully pulpit. His words from Hiroshima will undoubtedly strengthen the humanitarian movement. In the present crisis of a renewed nuclear arms race and escalating tensions between Russia and NATO, Obama's shout-out to the world is at least a step in the right direction.

I find it sad, not to mention unacceptable, that the Canadian government has not given one ounce of public support to Obama's efforts. Canada, which used to play a bridge-building role between the nuclear and non-nuclear powers, remains silent. This was bad enough in the Harper years, but it is perplexing that the Trudeau government, which has in many ways reached out to the U.N.'s global security agenda, ignores the role that history is calling it to play.

It is worse than that. At the recent Geneva meetings, Canada contributed a working paper that danced around the legality of nuclear weapons and brushed off the humanitarian efforts to start negotiations on the grounds that the absence of the nuclear powers would lead to instability. Canada's position was scorned at the meeting. Two decades ago, when Canada believed in the efficacy of a ban on anti-personnel landmines, it didn't let the resistance of the major powers stop it.

Canada's policies on nuclear disarmament appear to be still operating with a Cold War mentality. This is also true of other NATO countries. I hope Prime Minister Trudeau will personally become seized of the issue in its vast political dimensions. It's going to take prime ministerial leverage to move Canadian policies forward.

In going to Hiroshima, President Obama is calling out to policy-makers around the world to eliminate nuclear weapons. As an Honorary Citizen of Hiroshima, I cry out my support. It is the cry of the *hibakusha*, the Japanese who suffered so terribly, "Never again nuclear weapons!"

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*Former Senator and former Ambassador for Disarmament Douglas Roche has visited Hiroshima several times.*