

# **Overcoming Obstacles to a Nuclear Weapons-Free World**

**By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.**

**Address to Mayors for Peace Declaration Event\***

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*I strongly believe that nuclear weapons are absolute evil and need to be abolished from the earth as soon as possible. The idea that the possession of nuclear weapons would contribute to world peace and security is an egoistic argument of the nuclear-weapons states and it is absolutely wrong. Imagine how the world could be peaceful and people could live assured if all nuclear weapons were eliminated.*

*We, the A-bomb survivors, will continue to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons. No matter what obstacles stomp over us, we will stand up again and never stop speaking until the last day of our lives.*

On the day I started to prepare this address, the mail brought me a letter from my friend, Akihiro Takahashi, a survivor or *hibakusha* of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. As a 14-year-old boy, he crawled over rubble left from the A-bomb to soak his searing skin in the river that flows through Hiroshima. Later, he became the director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, where I met him. We corresponded.

This summer, when I returned to Hiroshima for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, Akihiro gave a Power Point presentation to the delegates at the Mayors for Peace Conference. He showed paintings depicting his life in the hours following the bombing. The hideous sights of burnt skin were riveting. The woman beside me, an American NGO activist, started crying. Afterwards, Akihiro called me and a few others to the stage where he draped a white and red lei, made of paper cranes, over my shoulders. “Remember,” he whispered to me.

A few weeks later, his latest letter reached my home.

Listen again to Akihiro

We the A-bomb survivors, will continue to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons. No matter what obstacles stomp over us, we will stand up again and never stop speaking until the last day of our lives.

Akihiro is, of course, a friend of Mayor Tad Akiba, who has built Mayors for Peace into a vibrant organization with 1,080 Mayors in 112 countries and regions now members. The decision by Mayor Dave Bronconnier and the City Council of Calgary to join this world-wide effort to eliminate nuclear weapons is a signal moment in our country. Calgary is an important engine of Canada and its forward-minded thinking is highly respected around the world. I salute Mayor Bronconnier and the City Council for taking this important step.

All over the world, the leaders of municipalities are now reminding national governments of the consequences, at the local level, of nuclear weapons policies. Mayors are asserting their legitimate interest in keeping their hospitals, transportation, food, water and sanitation systems from being blown to pieces. In other words, cities would be on the front lines of nuclear warfare; consequently, they have a right to speak out against nuclear weapons. As one mayor at the conference in Hiroshima put it: “It is the cities that bombs will fall on, not national governments.”

It is, perhaps ironically, considering the pro-nuclear stand of the government, in the U.S. where mayors have spoken out most strongly. In 2004, the United States Conference of Mayors, which represents more than 1,000 of America's largest cities, passed a resolution declaring that "weapons of mass destruction have no place in a civilized world," and called for the immediate commencement of negotiations on the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons; the negotiations should be concluded in 2010 and fully implemented by 2020. Akiba reasons that when enough mayors around the world start putting pressure on governments action will follow.

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More and more, people are beginning to ask: How serious is the nuclear weapons problem. Here is my answer.

When the first atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, it could hardly have been imagined that sixty years later more than 30,000 nuclear weapons would be in existence. The Cold War is long over, but still half the world population lives under a government brandishing nuclear weapons. More than \$12 trillion has so far been spent on these instruments of mass murder, which is a theft from the poorest people in the

world. The present nuclear weapons crisis has, in fact, led to the opening of the Second Nuclear Age.

First, we must understand the dimensions of the crisis. The longstanding nuclear weapons States, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China, are making nuclear weapons permanent instruments of their military doctrines. India, Pakistan and Israel have joined the “nuclear club.” North Korea threatened to get into it and is only held off by the promise of technological aid for development. Iran is suspected of trying to convert nuclear fuels for peaceful purposes into nuclear weapons. NATO is maintaining U.S. nuclear weapons on the soil of six European countries, and the U.S. is preparing a new “bunker buster” nuclear weapon.

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia said that their nuclear weapons were only for deterrence purposes; now they are part of war-fighting strategies. The nuclear weapons States refuse to give up their nuclear arsenals, and feign surprise that other nations, seeing that nuclear weapons have become the currency of power in the modern world, are trying to acquire them. So are terrorists. No major city in the world is safe from the threat of a nuclear attack. The risk of accidents is multiplying daily. All these are the characteristics of the Second Nuclear Age.

Much of the public, thinking the nuclear weapons problem went away with the end of the Cold War, is oblivious to the new nuclear dangers. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is trying to warn governments and the public, but few are listening. In the case of many politicians, they don't even know that they don't know about this greatest threat to human security the world has ever faced. The continued existence of more than 30,000 nuclear weapons, most with a destructive power many times greater than the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is not understood.

Nuclear weapons are instruments of pure evil. A nuclear explosion, either by design or accident, would kill massive numbers of people, create international chaos, and cripple the world economy.

Nuclear weapons are devoid of the slightest shred of moral legitimacy. Prominent jurists consider their use illegal in any possible circumstance. The nuclear weapons States are deliberately undermining the rule of law in maintaining them. It staggers the imagination to consider what the enormous sums spent on nuclear weapons could have done for education, health, and other requisites for the development of peoples everywhere. The United States administration is spending \$112 million *every day* on the maintenance of its nuclear weapons and seeking money

from Congress for new ones. This is driving world military spending, which, in 2004, exceeded \$1 trillion, a 20 percent increase in two years.

Money has been mis-appropriated in the most undemocratic way imaginable. Nowhere have people clamoured for nuclear weapons. Rather, governments have either imposed them or manipulated public opinion to get people to quietly accept them. A recent international poll in of citizens in 11 countries including the U.S. and Canada, showed that 86 percent of people either strongly agree (72 percent) or agree to some extent (14 percent) that all nations should sign a treaty to ban all nuclear weapons. Governments are ignoring this opinion; the public, except for core groups of activists, is not actively demanding that governments move toward such a treaty.

In this new nuclear age, when public attention is sapped by the repercussions of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the entire framework of nuclear disarmament is in danger of being swept away. The month-long 2005 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty ended in deadlock between the nuclear haves and have nots. The U.N. Summit document of 2005 even excluded mention of disarmament and non-proliferation. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is stagnating. Strategic arms reductions between the U.S. and Russia, who together possess 96 percent of all nuclear weapons, are faltering. The ongoing work

of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva is paralyzed. Time is running out. The Council of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which won the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize for its work on nuclear disarmament, says:

The difficulties and even the possibility of a collapse of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the weakening of the taboos in place since 1945 on the use of nuclear weapons, coupled with the dangers of a terrorist group detonating a nuclear explosive device, combine to produce a recipe for unmitigated disaster.

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It is in times of crisis that the nuclear disarmament movement has been strongest. This was true in the 1980s when there were massive protests against NATO's deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe. Today, the Abolition 2000 movement is gaining strength, and the number of expert non-governmental activists in dialogue with governments is growing. Solid work is being done in laying the political, legal, and technical foundation for a nuclear weapons-free world. This work appears to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the nuclear crisis, but the quality of the work gives hope that the world, once awakened, can move beyond a repetition of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The framework for a nuclear weapons-free world is coming into view even as the daily news seems discouraging. It is perhaps paradoxical

that a light can be seen, by those with vision, even in the darkness of the moment.

My experience tells me that it is reasonable to hope for, and to work for, a world beyond Hiroshima. As a parliamentarian, diplomat and educator, I have worked on nuclear disarmament issues for more than 30 years. I understand the lassitude and obstinacy of governments all too well. But I also see the developments taking place in civil society where increasing numbers of highly informed and deeply committed activists are cooperating with like-minded governments to get things done to improve human security. The Anti-Personnel Landmines Treaty, the International Criminal Court, and the new surge of government commitment to Official Development Assistance have come about because of civil society's input into government machinery.

We stand on the threshold of the construction of a viable plan for a nuclear weapons-free world resulting from the active cooperation of knowledgeable leaders of civil society working with those politicians and officials of like-minded governments who truly want to move forward.

The day will arrive when nuclear weapons abolition takes effect or the world will be devastated by a nuclear attack. Once or the other will

happen. No person, informed on the gravity of the situation, can deny it. As I consider the future of my grandchildren, I know what I have to do.

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Mayors for Peace is responding to this crisis. The conference in Hiroshima, attended by 243 participants from 92 cities, took up Mayor Akiba's challenge to make the next year a "Year of Inheritance, Awakening and Commitment." It reaffirmed Akiba's Vision 2020 emergency campaign. It declared:

"We, the participants in this General Conference of Mayors for Peace:

1. Call upon all governments to immediately start negotiations toward the conclusion of an international treaty banning nuclear weapons leading to total abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020.
2. Demand that countries possessing nuclear weapons promptly cease their operational deployment.
3. Invite government leaders, in particular those of countries possessing nuclear weapons, to visit the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and see with their own eyes what nuclear weapons have in store for humankind.

4. Demand that governments actively deal with the entire range of global challenges, including hunger, poverty, discrimination, violence and environmental destruction.

5. Demand that governments throughout the world promote efforts by the whole of international society to deal with environmental problems including full implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

6. Demand reductions in military expenditures and the use of funds generated by those reductions to address problems in such areas as peace, hunger, refugees, and the environment, while actively promoting the conversion of industrial capacity from military to civilian use.”

This ambitious program of action, actively backed by 79 mayors and 105 legislators, is now being implemented in harmony with an action plan by the Middle Powers Initiative to launch an “Article VI Forum” of like-minded States to begin work on the legal, technical and political requirements for a nuclear weapons-free world.

Together, the Middle Powers Initiative and Mayors for Peace can contribute to progress. We can show all the nuclear weapons States that the world can work together in addressing this greatest of all security problems. However, MPI and M4P cannot do this alone. Much will depend on public backing and political support for these new initiatives. A

rising public demand for nations to get on with negotiating and implementing a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban the production and deployment of all nuclear weapons may take hold in the future. The work of Mayors for Peace, with its growing and extensive network around the world, could stimulate that demand.

It can be expected that one or more of the nuclear weapons States will resist and continue to claim that it still needs nuclear weapons. But such claims would have less and less credibility in a world where the architecture for security without nuclear weapons became better understood and where the universal norm against the possession of nuclear weapons was growing in stature.

The work of Project Ploughshares and the Canadian Centre for Peace Education is vital in informing the public, deepening peace education and developing public opinion. We have shown in the past that the Government of Canada responds to public opinion. Now is the time to support Mayors for Peace in their campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons by 2020. Let us say with Akihiro Takahashi that, no matter the obstacles, we will never stop speaking out until the last day of our lives.

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On this International Day of Peace, 2005, let us remember: we have the historical momentum for the abolition of nuclear weapons on our side. The Non-Proliferation Treaty, the International Court of Justice, the votes of the majority of nations are all calling for an “unequivocal undertaking” and systematic progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. The proponents of nuclear weapons have been reduced to ridiculous arguments to justify nuclear retention. Not only are nuclear weapons immoral and illegal, they are devoid of any intellectual standing. Those who defend nuclear weapons should be laughed at – as one day they will, when humanity discovers it has the strength to overcome the merchants of evil. Future generations will look back on our time and say without hesitation that nuclear weapons were an anachronism, the obsession of old men trapped in the past. It will be a source of wonder to future generations how humanity ever tolerated the means to its own mass destruction.

It is our job to work towards this future of enlightenment. The people of the world want us to succeed in building true human security. We must feel confident that we can do the job. We must know that we can respond to our historical calling. We must be forever determined to build a nuclear weapons-free world. Hiroshima gives me that strength and hope.