

Beyond Hiroshima: A World Free of Nuclear Weapons

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Is there a new idea waiting to be articulated for nuclear disarmament?
Is there some new fact waiting to be uncovered? Is there a new plea waiting
to be made?

I have searched for the solution to the nuclear weapons dilemma. I
have read the reports of experts, listened to the pleas of the *hibakusha*,
searched within my mind and heart for more understanding.

What we are witnessing is a paradox: there is a historical momentum
leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons at the same time as the danger
of their use is increasing. Widespread public indifference exacerbates
efforts to put a global spotlight on this threat to life on the planet.

In dealing with the frustrations of this issue, I have come to rely on
one word: resilience. We must exercise resilience in dealing with the
obstacles to nuclear disarmament.

Resilience means an ability to recover from or adjust easily to
misfortune or change; to be able to withstand or recover quickly from
difficult conditions. Applying the word to our situation, we see that by
adopting a resilient attitude, we can withstand the power politics that forces
nuclear weapons on us, and recover our own strength to overcome the
pressures intended to defeat us. Resilience truly means: we shall overcome.

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Every effort must be made to obtain a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban the production, as well as the use, of nuclear weapons, Nuclear weapons must be formally declared illegal; any use anywhere for any reason must be codified as a crime against humanity. The deadlock in the operation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty combined with the increasing danger of the use of nuclear weapons demand a focused effort to start building the architecture to support a nuclear weapons-free world. Time is urgent.

All this might be considered the short-term strategy. It cannot wait for the peaceful resolution of conflict around the world, as if regional tranquility must be achieved before the nuclear weapons states will give up their arsenals. Neither can we wait for humanity to overcome its proclivity for greed, as if a more compassionate human nature must be developed before society can lay down its instruments of mass destruction.

It is true that nuclear weapons are about far more than nuclear weapons. They are about power. They are about economic exploitation. They are about racism. They are about fear. Nuclear proponents have deceived the public for a long time that nuclear weapons are about deterrence, that they are necessary to ensure our own security and that their use, while to be regretted, is justified in the protection of our way of life. Lies. Just as truth is the first casualty of war, the rationale constantly

advanced for the possession of nuclear wars is deceit and an insidious manipulation of public thinking.

A deep analysis of the true reason for the continued existence of nuclear weapons leads into the terrain of the human psyche. The same is true of war. Is a war necessary in any given circumstance, such as Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq, to resolve a problem of aggression? Or is it the outcome of the determination of a political or military actor to wage war for vested interests? When we look at the debacle of Iraq, we know the answer. The military-industrial complex, a powerful influence in political decision-making, benefits commercially from war and profiteers from the maintenance of the nuclear weapons systems. They don't want to let go, and seize on instabilities to make their case, always appealing to the fears, griefs and anxieties of the human condition.

The human condition is, at the best of times, clouded by aggression. That may be expressing reality too mildly. We have fought wars throughout human history (though there have been intermittent periods of peace). The inter-action of human beings always throws up conflict. And so the pessimists say that, human nature being what it is, we will always need to protect ourselves. We cannot expect angels to walk the streets of the world.

This view of humanity – dark, apprehensive, acquisitive – is a principal obstacle to a nuclear weapons-free world. Nuclear weapons have become part of the condition of continued existence in a decidedly imperfect world. Yes, they are dangerous, people tell pollsters. Yes, the world would be better without them, the polls record. But behind a benevolent response lies lassitude borne of an interior conviction that the human condition is such that nuclear weapons will continue to exist. That is just the way it is.

The architecture for a nuclear weapons-free world – the strengthening of international law and verification systems – runs up against a primal need to change human thinking. Human thinking does, of course, change.

Legalized slavery, colonialism, apartheid were all done away with when societal thinking matured and decided to instigate the proper political and legal machinery. But such transformations take a long time.

How long will it take for the public mind to awake, if not erupt, and decide that nuclear weapons are too dangerous a threat to the very development of the human condition that, through science, technology and the appreciation of human rights instruments, is making the world a better place? In other words, a public clamour to excise nuclear weapons from their threat to the continuation of life on the planet?

Once such a clamour (call it a concerted campaign) takes hold and the public determines that it will be freed of the nuclear apocalypse, the putting into place the pieces of the architecture for a nuclear weapons-free world will be greatly eased. The awakening of the public mind to the full benefits of life on earth without nuclear weapons is, perhaps, a long-term strategy. Human beings do not change overnight.

The short-term strategy, immediate action, needs the long-term strategy to be effective. The long-term strategy needs the short term strategy to give it focus and impetus. Both strategies need each other. They are inter-locked. Immediate steps and a full vision are mutually complementary.

Is there vision to implement a two-pronged course of action? Governments, for the most part reeling with daily crises, cannot do this because the effects of the human condition have driven them too far apart. Civil society, even that element most attuned to nuclear dangers, cannot do it because it does not have its hands on the levers of power. But players and groups within each can create a critical mass to move government machinery and public thinking forward at the same time. This fusion of effort occurred in the development of the Anti-Personnel Land Mines Treaty and the International Criminal Court, and it can occur in a growing movement to banish nuclear weapons from earth.

It is not as if such an effort has to start from scratch. There is, in fact, considerable momentum, from a historical perspective, of the evolution of human rights thinking and the gradual tightening of the net on the moral and legal base for nuclear weapons. The strong legal basis of the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a result of the deliberations of 1995 and 2000, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 1996, the formation of the New Agenda Coalition, the discernible restlessness within NATO, the formation of the Abolition 2000 network, the growing effectiveness of research centres and other institutes, the public opinion polls – all this constitutes movement forward. From an historical point of view, humanity has already begun the long journey from Hiroshima to a nuclear weapons-free world.

Of course, huge obstacles remain – both in the difficulties in creating an effective architecture and the pessimism of public thinking. It is these obstacles, reinforced by a media that dwells on the confrontational rather than the creative dimension of life, that we frequently dwell on. It is hard to work on both fronts, the short-range and the long-range, when we feel so weighed down, not to mention preoccupied with the daily demands of ordinary life.

Still, recognizing the growing dangers to humanity and understanding that humanity truly is at a turning point in our long existence on the planet forces us to lift up our eyes. The very act of lifting up our eyes changes our attitude. And a changed attitude is the key to change.

So often, in my lectures, I am asked, “What can I do?” The answer can provide many choices, depending on one’s circumstances. But a starting point for everyone – government official and civil society activist – is to lift up our eyes.

There we can see the machinery already put into place through 60 years of United Nations activity. We see the legal instruments to protect human rights, the agencies and programs that provide development services and protect the environment, the treaties and agreements to curb the arms races. Why not put into place a Nuclear Weapons Convention? Why not indeed? Lifting up our eyes is the first step to stimulating motivation and gathering energy to act.

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Looking beyond our immediate setting, we can see that exploring the legal, political and technical requirements for a nuclear weapons-free world is possible. This action, though focusing on the short-term, involves the players in an exchange of views that breaks out of preconceived positions

and opens up dialogue. Despite the endless talk at the United Nations, there is actually very little dialogue. This is because of the system of regional groupings. In recent years, a start at inter-group activity (the New Agenda Coalition is an example) has been made, but it is still primitive.

The oneness of humanity, an idea once considered the preserve of religion, is now a crass pragmatic. In the modern world, we will live together or die together because nuclear weapons threaten to kill us all. So dialogue, to understand better all the implications of a unity forced upon the human condition, is now essential.

Dialogue, a sincere opening of the mind to the condition and needs of others, is a firm step towards reconciliation. Reconciliation is at the heart of the long-range strategy. In my book, *The Human Right Peace*, I discussed how reconciliation is an integral feature of the culture of peace, and drew from the U.N.'s Dialogue Among Civilizations, from which UNESCO produced the book, *Crossing the Divide*. Here I repeat that reconciliation is the highest form of dialogue. It includes the capacity to listen and the capacity not only to convince but also to be convinced and, most of all, the capacity to extend forgiveness. Reconciliation cannot only be dealt with at the institutional level; it is a challenge to the hearts and minds of individuals.

Reconciliation is a rejection of the limitations of the status quo. It requires confronting the truth. It demands that we look into the eyes of peace, internal peace, peace with ourselves, first. Partnerships follow. This produces a global ethic for institutions and civil society built on a common longing for peace, justice, partnerships and truth.

There is no finer example of reconciliation in action today than the *hibakusa* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mayor Tad Akiba lauds them because, from the outset of the calamity that befell them, they rejected hatred or revenge. They do not see the human race as a collection of enemies. They refuse to view the human community as a tense standoff among selfish entities battling over territory and resources. Rather, they see all humans as members of one family, a single unit. Having experienced the ultimate consequent of animosity, the *hibakusha* deliberately envisioned a world beyond war in which the human family learns to cooperate.

When they tell their stories, one of the most commonly heard phrases is, “I do not want anyone else to suffer the way I did.” They mean no one. They have captured the truth of reconciliation. In opting for life in excruciating circumstances under which no one could have blamed them had they chosen death, they continue to teach us a lesson, Akiba says. “If we hope to survive the 21st century, we must emphasize that understanding the

experience of the A-bomb survivors is among the most important tasks we face.”

Reconciliation cannot be taught or imposed, though more dedicated education on disarmament requirements would be a helpful step. Neither is reconciliation a technique. It is essentially an attitude, a reaching out from within to contribute to a common elevation of human conduct. Though idealistic, it is achievable. Charismatic leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, practiced it. It is certainly dangerous; charismatic leaders have been assassinated because they tried to cross the divide. Reconciliation is not for the weak of heart.

Active work for nuclear disarmament is a direct contribution to reconciliation, the full bloom of which may be a long way off. But we cannot wait for human reconciliation and the consequent relaxation of tensions around the world to develop a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Urgency for survival and vision of human improvement have intersected.

The wonderful quality of resilience helps us to cope with the nuclear dangers.