



Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu

The Imperatives for Disarmament in the 21st Century

**Ninth Conference of Mayors for Peace: “Work towards the realization of a
world without nuclear weapons”**

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8 August, 2017
Nagasaki

Mayor Tomihisa Taue of Nagasaki,
Mr. Yasuyoshi Komizo, Secretary-General of Mayors for Peace,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to address you during my first trips to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in my capacity as the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to deliver my address on disarmament, just one month after the historic adoption of the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Before I start, I'd like to thank the student performers of the Peace Bell music. I was impressed by the combination of complex movements by each player, which make up the beautiful music in harmony. Our work towards a world without nuclear weapons will be something similar.

I wish to pay tribute to the contribution of this organization toward realizing a world without nuclear weapons. Civic leaders are by definition a core vanguard of civil society. I have witnessed in the places where I worked or visited in the past- Sarajevo, Kabul, Kandahar, Mosul or Juba alike - it is cities and their populations that bear the brunt of the suffering caused by armed conflict. I commend your efforts to elevate the voices of cities and their citizens around the world, who are among the main stakeholders in the cause of disarmament.

The elimination of nuclear weapons has been and will continue to be one of the primary objectives of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. However, like with the Covenant of the Mayors for Peace, the United Nations places this primary objective within the broader context of the ultimate objective of the disarmament process.

By addressing the issue of nuclear weapons in a broader context, it is not my intention to imply that we must first solve the problem of general disarmament before we can hope to finally eliminate nuclear weapons. Rather, my objective today is to speak about the current imperatives for disarmament in light of the international situation we face today and in light of the challenges and threats we expect to face in the future.

This broader perspective is embedded in the Charter of the United Nations and has underpinned the past seventy years of efforts. Article 11 of the Charter explicitly gives the General Assembly the authority to consider the principles governing disarmament and the regulations of arms.

Ever since the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, these twin objectives – disarmament and the regulation of arms – have respectively represented the goals of eliminating weapons of mass destruction on the one hand, and the regulation of conventional arms on the other hand.

Furthermore, the plan of action adopted at the first special session of the General Assembly in 1978 devoted to disarmament recognized the elimination of nuclear weapons as the highest priority for disarmament negotiations.

The track record in implementing this plan of action was positive for about two decades after 1978. During that time, the United Nations achieved conventions on certain conventional weapons and on the elimination of biological and chemical weapons. It also established mechanisms to increase transparency in arms transfers and in military expenditures. Successive rounds of bilateral and unilateral strategic arms reductions substantially reduced the global stockpiles of nuclear weapons from their Cold War highs of about 70,000.

Yet, there is a widespread perception that in recent decades, progress toward our highest priority has stalled. The pace of nuclear arms reductions has slowed. Nuclear weapon systems remain on high alert, available for launch within minutes. Nuclear-armed countries are modernizing and upgrading their arsenals. Several of these States are also continuing to build up the overall size and diversity of their warheads and delivery systems.

There are many self-described realists in the world today of the annual global military expenditure of \$1.7 trillion who call disarmament a utopian dream, which can only be realized in ideal circumstances of world peace. But this cynical worldview turns our present situation on its head. To paraphrase Dag Hammarskjöld, the goal of disarmament is not to bring us to heaven, but rather it is to spare humanity from ever again suffering from horrors like those experienced by the Hibakusha.

To overcome these challenges, we need to consider the basic motivations for disarmament and to understand its role and potential in maintaining international peace and security.

Let me today focus on three key issues: 1) the imperatives for disarmament, and why we need to make progress in today's international security environment, 2) new challenges we are facing, and 3) possible ways forward.

The imperatives for disarmament in the 21st century

The security imperative

One of the most important imperatives for disarmament is international security. The United Nations was created to maintain international peace and security, and as such, security is central to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The UN Charter prohibits the use of force against the political independence or territorial integrity of States. The UN Charter also established a framework for collective security, where States would only be allowed to use force in self-defense and in the collective action authorized by the Security Council.

In this connection, the logic of disarmament is to promote the security for all, individually and collectively. For decades, the security imperative has been the driving force behind measures for nuclear disarmament.

The nuclear-armed States bear the largest responsibility for making progress on nuclear disarmament. This has been politically and legally accepted by the entire international community, both nuclear-armed States and others, since the dawn of the nuclear era, and is central to the "grand bargain" reflected in the NPT.

But it is equally important to emphasize that these nuclear-armed States would also be the primary beneficiaries of disarmament. Steps to reduce arsenals, lower alert levels and mitigate risks of incidents can build confidence. Measures to curtail the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons can prevent an expensive new arms race. The elimination of various arms intended for first strikes can promote stability in times of crisis. Disarmament measures can also play a positive role in responding to breaches of the peace and in preventing armed conflict from subsequently re-emerging.

Taken together, these measures can create the conditions for ending regional disputes, for resolving conflicts and for facilitating the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide.

Due to constant advances in military capabilities and in the nature of armed conflict, inaction on nuclear disarmament cannot be equated with maintaining the status quo. Inaction on disarmament will lead to a world that is more insecure and less stable. Because we have situations such as DPRK, or tensions in the Middle East, we need serious discussions and steps for disarmament. We must make every effort to find political solutions to disputes, to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons and to find ways to reduce and eliminate what already exists.

It should also be emphasized that the nuclear-armed States do not bear the responsibility for achieving disarmament alone. In fact, the preamble of the new Prohibition Treaty rightfully recognizes that the risks posed by nuclear weapons concern the security of all humanity, and that all States share the responsibility to prevent their use.

The universal acceptance of this goal led the International Court of Justice to determine that the disarmament obligation transcends any treaty and is a requirement under customary international law.

The humanitarian imperative

While the objectives of disarmament continue to be most strongly associated with security, the humanitarian imperative is in fact the oldest driver for arms control in the modern era.

Since the mid-19th Century, the international community has sought to progressively develop the law of armed conflict in parallel with rules to prohibit or restrict specific weapons that cannot be used in conformity with humanitarian principles.

Since the end of the Second World War, the humanitarian imperative has also been linked to the objective of protecting civilians from the effects of armed conflict. It is also the frame from which civil society has had the greatest leverage and influence in the process of making new law and establishing new norms.

In this connection, more recent humanitarian disarmament initiatives have banned or restricted weapons that produce undetectable fragments, mines, booby-traps, blinding laser weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, and so on.

And, of course, the humanitarian movement was the driving force behind the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Development and environmental imperatives for disarmament

In recent decades, disarmament has largely slipped off the development agenda. This is despite overwhelming evidence that the over-accumulation of arms fuels conflict, drives the illicit trade, enables violent extremism and facilitates gross violations of human rights and humanitarian principles. Thus, the failure to put in place an effective system for the regulation of arms has had a devastating toll on socio-economic development, sustainable growth, gender equality and human well-being.

Environmental imperatives for disarmament have been largely dormant in recent years, but may have considerable potential for the future. Environmentalism has proven to be a potent but understated force for arms control. The United Nations recently completed a study on the environmental impact of armed conflict. But, the problem of addressing concerns resulting from particular types or categories of weapon systems remains very much an open question for disarmament bodies.

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, is a universal and integrated framework which brings together development, peace and security and environmental objectives comprehensively. We must redouble our efforts to ensure that disarmament actions, which can make enormous contributions to establishing peaceful societies, are fully anchored in the implementation efforts of the SDGs.

Emerging challenges and threats

Ladies and gentlemen,

I spoke enough on "why disarmament today", but understanding the various roles for disarmament helps to inform our collective response to the challenges and threats that have emerged since the start of this Century. These new challenges and threats, which are of course exacerbated by the existence of terrorist groups with regional and global reach, can be described as falling into one of two categories.

Use of illegal weapons and the misuse of other weapons

The first challenge relates to the unacceptable harm to civilians resulting from arms-related abuses. This challenge takes many forms, ranging from the indiscriminate use of weapons, to the illicit trade in weapons and even the re-emergence of prohibited weapons whose use has been deemed not to be in line with the conscience of humanity.

We have seen in recent conflicts the devastating effects caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Data collected by non-governmental organizations has shown that when such weapons are used in populated areas, civilians account for 90 per cent of casualties. Many governments have recognized this problem. They have pledged to support the collection of data on the harm to civilians caused by such use of explosive weapons and on good practices and lessons learned to minimize the impacts. A group of States also remains committed to developing a political commitment for governments to refrain from such use.

Excessive accumulation and the illicit trade in arms and ammunition, especially small arms and light weapons, continue to pose a significant threat to the maintenance of peaceful and sustainable societies. This illicit trade impedes socio-economic development, facilitates transnational organized crime and exacerbates the lethality and duration of armed conflict. The full implementation of the United Nations programme of action remains essential in combatting the illicit trade, including through the adoption of necessary national legislation. There is also a need for more action to facilitate international assistance and capacity-building, including to improve physical security and stockpile management.

Finally, we have all witnessed with shock and horror the re-emergence of chemical weapons in the context of the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Despite the extraordinary efforts of the international community leading to the destruction of that country's declared programme, we continue to receive allegations of the use of chemical weapons with disturbing regularity. The United Nations remains determined to investigate all credible allegations and to identify the perpetrators of these acts. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable, and we consider this as critical agenda of preventing further erosion of the existing norms against chemical weapons, which goes much beyond Syria.

Emerging technologies and capabilities

The second challenge relates to emerging military capabilities and means of warfare. These also include what the Secretary-General has termed "frontier issues". Given the rapid pace of technological innovation driving many of these developments, their full implications are not yet known. But it is already clear that many emerging military capabilities pose grave and overlapping risks, including to international stability and to upholding humanitarian and human rights principles. In some cases, they are also straining the ability of our normative and regulatory frameworks to keep pace and to mitigate any harmful impacts.

Examples of problematic emerging capabilities include long-range conventional missiles, anti-missile and anti-satellite systems and cyber weapons. These capabilities all involve risks to international and regional stability. In some situations, there is also concern over the potential of these new strategic weapons to contribute to new arms races, diminish stability and jeopardize existing arms control frameworks.

There are serious concerns about the ability of lethal autonomous weapon systems to effectively comply with international humanitarian law. This is especially concerning if these systems are developed for use in complex environments or in situations where their use may result in civilian casualties.

Looking farther into the future, advances in artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing and bio-synthetic engineering have tremendous potential to improve human life, productivity and well-being. However, if poorly managed, their development may also have grave consequences for the future of humankind.

A possible way forward – Conclusion

Let me try to conclude. Efforts to control arms have been increasingly recognized as intersecting with achieving priorities in the fields of sustainable development, humanitarian principles, human rights, and peace and security. These broader objectives have throughout the last Century motivated landmark achievements in the field of disarmament and arms control. We must now have the renewed, redoubled commitment, a new vision and concrete actions for disarmament in the 21st century. I believe that our ability to respond effectively to the current and emerging security challenges of this Century will require us to embrace each of these imperatives for disarmament.

As we start our considerations for such a vision at the United Nations under the new leadership of Secretary-General Guterres, let me suggest only three key issues today.

First, I believe that we must reposition disarmament as a key and integral part of international peace and security agenda.

I think the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a case in point. Ending the DPRK's illicit and destabilizing activities and achieving the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula will be inconceivable unless it is pursued within a broader context of regional peace and security. Likewise, no sustainable political solution is possible there unless serious disarmament plans in DPRK can be negotiated and agreed upon. The on-going international actions on chemical weapons in Syria are a similar example.

My second point relates to the importance of norm development in disarmament. This has been a constant theme dating back to the 1868 Declaration of Saint Petersburg, which prohibited exploding bullets on the grounds that they caused unnecessary suffering.

The prohibition treaty will put nuclear weapons on the same level as chemical and biological weapons, which were deemed in 1925 as incompatible with the principles of humanity. The promotion of these norms were essential in laying the ground work for both preventing the proliferation of these weapons and for their eventual elimination. I think the case of chemical and biological weapons also demonstrates how the pursuit and elaboration of humanitarian norms can bring real security benefits.

I would like to emphasize that the effective implementation of various norms and instruments is equally important. We must have a renewed action particularly in the areas where we can make a concrete, visible progress to save lives, such as conventional weapons and use of certain weapons in populated areas.

My third and final point today is about the need to have a new cooperation amongst states, building new coalitions, as well as new partnerships between states and civil society for disarmament. This is relevant for all diverse disarmament areas. But today, let me refer specifically to nuclear disarmament in the context with the newly adopted Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty.

I appeal to governments to stop looking at the nuclear disarmament agenda in a dichotomy of the NPT versus the Ban Treaty, but rather from a perspective of the entire framework of treaties, which are all politically and mutually reinforcing of each other. Long before the ban treaty, the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime was already an intricate web of multilateral, plurilateral, regional, bilateral and even unilateral treaties, agreements, instruments, regimes and commitments. These are various legally binding, politically binding or purely voluntary instruments.

What's important is not that we agree on the merit of every existing or possible measure, but rather that they all lead to the same end, namely the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

There are many possible paths leading to nuclear zero. It should not matter which path is taken, as long as it can be demonstrated that concrete progress is being made.

So we cannot rest having completed the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty in more than 20 years. We must now focus on the hard work ahead, of transforming our shared norms into practical actions for the elimination of nuclear arsenals and of encouraging States to re-engage in the dialogue necessary to bridge the political divide.

In order to achieve this, we need new cooperation, a new vision and new understanding of what benefits disarmament can bring to us.

As civic-focused advocates, I am sure you will agree on the power of building multi-stakeholder communities. And, as much as the future of humanity resides in cities, your work and your outreach will play a critical role in contributing to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, to the future actions in disarmament and to our ultimate objective of general and complete disarmament. Let us work together towards this noble objective.

Thank you very much.