

Intervention by Akira Kawasaki
Peace Boat/International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)
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Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Thank you, Mr Chair.

I am speaking for Peace Boat, a Steering Group partner of ICAN.

Peace Boat has traveled around the world with Hibakusha, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in sharing their first-hand testimonies in cities visited, thus raising awareness of the unspeakable human suffering the two atomic bombs have brought, which is still ongoing after over 70 years.

Dr Ira Helfand has given us a comprehensive account of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that any nuclear war today would cause. We are also reminded, in the discussion of the past few days, of the high risk of such use, whether deliberately or by accident. Given the catastrophic nature on a global scale of these consequences, I am ever convinced that this is a matter of security and survival of humankind that each one of us must take seriously to prevent.

Now let me raise the question regarding the notion that the humanitarian approach and the security-focused approach are in conflict with each other, a notion we sometimes hear in nuclear disarmament debates. In this Open-Ended Working Group, some delegations have positioned collective human security and national security as if they are two different, mutually-conflicting concepts. Is such a distinction valid? I do not believe so, especially given the global impact that any use of nuclear weapons would have.

Civil society groups around the world, including Hibakusha and other peoples affected by the production, testing and use of nuclear weapons, have been encouraged by the humanitarian initiative and have actively participated in the three international conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. However we have heard some governments, notably those dependent on nuclear weapons in their security policies, criticize the humanitarian approach as neglecting the security dimension. This kind of criticism has often been put forward by the governments promoting so-called “progressive approach” or “building blocks approach.”

In this relation, I would like to commend the government of Austria, which presented the working paper titled “Nuclear weapons and security: a humanitarian perspective,” WP.9. This paper makes a strong case to address the criticism that the humanitarian approach does not take the security dimension sufficiently into account, and concludes that a national security approach does not appear to contradict the humanitarian approach. I concur with this conclusion.

In front of us are a number of proposals to prohibit nuclear weapons and to start such a negotiation without delay.

Prohibiting nuclear weapons and thus establishing a universal legal norm against nuclear weapons would greatly help prevent the occurrence of such catastrophic humanitarian consequences. It would accelerate nuclear disarmament, and strengthen non-proliferation and nuclear security. It would also promote confidence building and peace talks in regions with military tensions. These are all in the interests of security – in all of its human, national and global dimensions. If anyone argues that prohibiting nuclear weapons is bad for security, the responsibility of proof lies on that side.

This morning we heard the powerful remarks of Ms Setsuko Thurlow as well as Ms Masako Wada of Hidankyo. The Hibakusha have courageously spoken about their suffering and have warned us of the present, real danger to humankind. They have called for a nuclear-weapon-free world to be achieved in their lifetime. Urgent action is needed. In this regards I commend the co-sponsors of Working Paper 34 that called on the General Assembly to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate a legally-binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons. I also encourage others to present the steps they can take to get the negotiation started. Now is the time to act.

Thank you Mr Chair.