

Akira Kawasaki's lecture at Hanyang University
9 October 2018

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a historic treaty that completely and comprehensively prohibits all activities engaging nuclear weapons, based on the notion that any use of nuclear weapons would be contrary to the rule of international humanitarian law. The treaty also provides pathways for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. At the same time, the treaty recognizes the rights of those affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons and provides for their assistance, as well as for environmental remediation.

The 122 states that voted in support to adopt the treaty last July are all nuclear-weapon-free states. All the 9 nuclear-armed states boycotted the negotiation of the treaty, and many are actively and publicly dismissing the treaty. Some thirty countries that do not have nuclear weapons on their own yet rely on other state's nuclear weapons for their security policies are also boycotting joining the treaty. These can be called nuclear-dependent states. South Korea, Japan, Australia, and the non-nuclear member states of NATO are all such nuclear-dependent states.

The Prohibition Treaty demands all states party to not engage in any activities related to nuclear weapons, including development, production, testing, possession, deployment, use, and threat to use. It also requires those nuclear-armed states that decide to join the treaty to destroy all nuclear arsenals and nuclear weapons programs under international verification, in a time-bound and irreversible manner. It prohibits states party from assisting, encouraging or inducing any activities prohibited by the treaty. This is a remarkable clause, particularly for nuclear-dependent states, because although they do not directly develop or possess nuclear weapons, they do employ policies that envision to assist or encourage their nuclear-armed ally to use nuclear weapons on their behalf. In the name of the so-called “nuclear umbrella,” they are a part of nuclear-war preparation.

Now let me consider what this treaty means for Northeast Asia.

The humanitarian movement that led to the adoption of the Prohibition Treaty was led by a group of enthusiastic states, particularly from Europe, Latin America and Africa. Southeast Asian and Pacific states have also joined and contributed positively. In contrast, Northeast Asian states have generally kept away from the movement. No Northeast Asian states have signed the treaty so far. Actually Northeast Asian states did not even participate in the treaty negotiations last year, except Mongolia, a strong nuclear disarmament advocate known as a single-state nuclear weapon free zone.

Why is Northeast Asia so shy of nuclear disarmament?

The first and foremost explanation is that Northeast Asian states are still deeply

dependent on the Cold War-type thinking that nuclear weapons constitute the central component of their national security. Both South Korea and Japan are dependent on the military alliance with the US that engages nuclear weapons. China has chosen to be a nuclear-armed state since the 1960s. North Korea has publicly pursued its nuclear armament since 2006. The Cold War divisions remain deeply rooted in Northeast Asia.

Therefore, the current high-level processes between South and North Korea, and North Korea and the US, have great importance in history, as these can lead to the end of the Cold War in Northeast Asia. I praise the visionary and skillful diplomatic initiative of President Moon Jae-in in this regard, as well as the South Korean civil society movement in support of it, including activities such as that of the Sunfull Foundation.

In the series of summits, the heads of states of South Korea, North Korea and the US have repeated that they are committed to end the Korean War and build a peace regime on a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. Building a peace regime means that all states will recognize the right of survival of others and commit not to threaten each other. Rights of survival and self-defense will be upheld. Yet, possessing, developing or introducing nuclear weapons will not be allowed. Why? Because it these are not compatible with the principles of international humanitarian law. This is exactly what the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons stands for.

International humanitarian law has the basic premise that the right of states to choose means of warfare is not unlimited, as stated in the Preamble of the Prohibition Treaty. States can claim their rights of survival and self-defense. But, not just any weapons can be permitted as legitimate for the sake of their survival or self-defense. Nuclear weapons are inherently non-discriminatory and inhumane, and therefore exceed the limit permitted as legitimate weapons. This is the logic of prohibiting nuclear weapons.

This logic needs to be applied when the international community demands North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. The abandonment of nuclear weapons should be demanded not because North Korea is a “bad country,” but because nuclear weapons themselves are bad weapons. This very point is often lost in the international negotiations on the nuclear disarmament of the Korean Peninsula. As civil society, we need to raise the voice to governments that the issue of nuclear weapons is a humanitarian issue.

I belong to the Tokyo-based NGO Peace Boat, which is a steering group member of ICAN. Peace Boat was founded in 1983 and is working for a peaceful and sustainable world with the mission of “learning from past wars, building peace for the future.” We study the atrocities and crimes committed by Japan during World War II and

before, working with the victims and those affected.

In committing to peace, nuclear disarmament is one of the priorities for Peace Boat, and I myself have directed its Hibakusha Project. Hibakusha is a Japanese word meaning those affected by radiation, and is often used as a term meaning survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hibakusha travel on board Peace Boat, a chartered passenger ship, sharing their testimonies with citizens around the world. Most people they meet have heard of the names of the two cities, and have seen photos of the mushroom cloud taken from above by military planes. But very few people have heard or imagined how humans suffered under this very mushroom cloud. The average age of the Hibakusha now exceeds 80. The way they courageously speak of the hell on earth that they had to experience impresses and moves the audience. Their efforts have thus contributed to building the grounds for a wide recognition of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

Japanese peace groups such as Peace Boat have been spreading the words of Hibakusha to appeal to the abolition of nuclear weapons and world peace. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are symbols of peace in Japan. But you may think “What about Japan’s past crimes and atrocities in its colonization and aggression?” - a legitimate question for you. Let me answer this. The purpose of sharing the testimony of the Hibakusha is not to appeal about Japan’s suffering. Rather, it is for the abolition of nuclear weapons, the most dangerous weapons on earth, which are posing a threat to the very survival of humankind today. The Hibakusha do not want to see anyone in the world suffer from what they went through.

In fact the Hibakusha are not all Japanese: Tens of thousands of Koreans, many of whom were forced to move to and work in Japan under Japan’s colonial rule, were also exposed to the bombs, along with US and other prisoners of war. Japanese groups are working in solidarity with those non-Japanese Hibakusha and nuclear test victims around the world, presenting the concept of “Global Hibakusha.”

Some may think that the use of nuclear weapons on Japan liberated Korea and the peoples of the rest of Asia. Yet, this is too simplified an understanding of history. Even without using nuclear weapons, Japan in 1944-1945 was already almost losing the war. Historians show that it was not just after the bombing on Hiroshima on August 6 that Japan's leadership decided to surrender. It decided to surrender when the Soviet Union started to attack Japan a couple of days later. It was not nuclear weapons that ended the war and liberated the peoples of Asia. Regrettably, the narrative that atomic weapons ended the war is preventing us from looking at the real face of those weapons. We must look at the reality of what atomic weapons brought upon people. Then you will understand that nuclear weapons are not a matter of national interest, but a matter of humanitarian harm. There are many Hibakusha in Korea. You can talk to them to hear first-hand.

The International Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons have repeatedly addressed the simulated detonation of nuclear weapons in the modern day, using cases such as Oslo, Mexico City and a US base in Central Europe. The simulated scientific data has led to the conclusion that there would be no international capacity to adequately respond to such a catastrophe. Even humanitarian relief would not be possible.

Learning from such results, the governments and non-governmental actors of Northeast Asia are encouraged to consider convening a similar conference for the region. They could thus investigate the potential humanitarian consequences in the event of detonations of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia today, and discuss what could or could not be prepared in a realistic sense. It is ironic that the only region in the world that has directly suffered from the use of nuclear weapons in wartime would have to make special efforts to recall the tragic memories after over 70 years. But it is very necessary, as in Northeast Asia there are dangerous signs of dealing with nuclear weapons too easily as a tool of international games.

Civil society actors from Japan and South Korea have long called for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia. Today, with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons established, if the states of Northeast Asia were to accede to the Prohibition Treaty together, the region would become nuclear-weapon-free.

When Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un met in Singapore in June, a delegation of ICAN representatives also travelled there and presented a roadmap for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Our key message is to utilize multilateral international laws to make a lasting denuclearized Peninsula.

We presented five steps to North Korea, the US and all relevant parties, including South Korea. First, to recognize the risk of nuclear use and the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of such use. Second, to reject nuclear weapons by joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Third, to remove North Korea's nuclear weapons through a verifiable and irreversible plan. Fourth, to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. And fifth, to rejoin the NPT and the world community

A regional policy goal could be set, that the three countries of North Korea, South Korea and Japan accede to the Prohibition Treaty at the same time. Such a joint accession would greatly contribute to the regional security of Northeast Asia. North Korea would be required, upon its accession, to dismantle all its nuclear weapons programs, in accordance with the provision of the treaty, under international monitoring in a time-bound, verifiable and irreversible manner. This would no doubt

bring about security benefits for South Korea and Japan, and more widely, internationally.

On the part of South Korea and Japan, the two countries would first be legally obligated to ensure that no nuclear weapons are stationed, installed or deployed in their territories, including within the US bases located in those countries, in accordance with the provision of treaty. North Korea has called for a verified confirmation of the non-existence of nuclear weapons on South Korean soil as a premise to discuss nuclear disarmament. South Korea's accession to the Prohibition Treaty would address this concern of the North.

South Korea and Japan would also be legally obligated to undertake to never, under any circumstances, assist, encourage or induce the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons by the US, in accordance with the treaty. In other words, the two states could still maintain their military alliances with the US but undertake not to assist, encourage or induce the particular act of using nuclear weapons.

Proponents of the traditional security concept of the "nuclear umbrella" might criticize such an option as unrealistic. But the threat of nuclear weapons is real. Relying on nuclear weapons and keeping those weapons usable, would one day result in an actual use, regardless of whether this would be by design or by accident. The consequences would be catastrophic. If South Korea and Japan were to determine never to undertake to assist, encourage or induce the US to use nuclear weapons, this would be a significant restraint preventing military tensions in the region from escalating into a nuclear exchange.

It is almost thirty years since the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War ended. Here in Northeast Asia, the end of Cold War has at last just began. You are the ones who are going to live in the post-Cold War Northeast Asia. How would you design the future of the region? I hope that you are confident in a nuclear-weapon-free future. ICAN's activities are to help you to live in a world without nuclear threats. And you are always welcome to join ICAN. We have succeeded in creating the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. Now we are going to abolish nuclear weapons. Yes ICAN, yes you can. Thank you very much.