

Religions for Peace

FINAL STATEMENT

“Our Shared Moral and Legal Obligation to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons:”

On the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons

August 3, 2016 | United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan

Twenty years ago on 8 July 1996, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a historic Advisory Opinion that stated: “The threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law. ... There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.”

The Court’s opinion has given a legal grounding for the efforts of religious communities, non-governmental organizations and governments to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons. In particular, it has generated powerful United Nations resolutions, adopted by the overwhelming majority of countries at the UN General Assembly each year since 1996, calling for a nuclear weapons convention – a global treaty to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

We—representatives of religious communities and civil society organizations, parliamentarians, scholars, diplomatic leaders and high school students—have convened at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan for a Special Session of the *Religions for Peace (RfP)* International Standing Commission on Disarmament and Security. We commit ourselves to deepening our partnerships to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

We agree that there can be no legitimate argument in morality, religion or law to justify any use of a nuclear weapon, the use of which is contrary to all the principles of international and humanitarian law that have been built up over the centuries. Nuclear weapons—as indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction—are intrinsically evil. Thus, even the development and possession of nuclear weapons is morally disordered.

Moreover, we are convinced that the moral and ethical imperatives against the use or possession of nuclear weapons are accessible to all men and women of goodwill because they arise from the depths of human conscience, which is itself more primordial than the technical debates over the legality of nuclear weapons, even as it also provides a foundation for them. In this light, we find encouragement in the fact that the United States President Mr. Barack Obama visited Hiroshima in May 2016.

We specifically:

- 1) **Support** the UN General Assembly resolution, adopted December 2015, “Ethical Imperatives for a Nuclear Weapons Free World,” which recalls “the noble principles of the Charter of the UN, enjoining the international community and declares that “given their indiscriminate nature and potential to annihilate humanity, nuclear weapons are inherently immoral.”
- 2) **Renew our commitment** to an international multi-stakeholder partnership to address the “humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons,” as the basis for a new legal instrument that will proscribe and ban nuclear weapons on a similar moral and legal footing as other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) such as chemical and biological weapons.
- 3) **Trust** the International Court of Justice, in its forthcoming verdict on the lawsuit filed by the Marshall Islands, to compel the nuclear armed states to fulfill their legal obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to commence in good faith immediate negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons.
- 4) **Urge governments** to engage the draft report (zero draft) of the Open-ended Working Group established by the UN General Assembly Resolution voted on 7 December 2015, which was circulated by the Group’s Chairman on 28 July 2016, and to actively participate in the final session of the Group so that it develops “legal measures, legal provisions and norms” for achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. We strongly support a recommendation contained in the draft report that the UN General Assembly convene a conference in 2017 “to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.”
- 5) **Strongly support** the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons currently undertaken by *Hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Their petition states that “it is our strong desire to achieve a nuclear weapon-free world in our lifetime, so that succeeding generations of people will not see hell on earth ever again.”
- 6) **Confirm** the violation of the human dignity of the *Hibakusha* and those people in numerous states seriously injured by nuclear weapons testing and call for the restoration of their dignity and serious consideration of their demands.
- 7) **Reaffirm** the joint statements advanced *first* by Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-

proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) Japan and *RfP* Japan in Tokyo on 21 April 2015, and *second* by *RfP* International, International PNND and Mayors for Peace in Hiroshima on 6 August 2015. The former emphasized the necessity of moving forward the establishment of a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, and the latter adopted on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was presented to the President of UN General Assembly in September 2015.

We appreciate that high school students raised their voices and expressed their earnest longing for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Their participation encourages us to hope that today's generation will bear its responsibility in achieving a nuclear weapon-free world for humankind of future generations. Comprehensive peace education is needed to engage the younger generation.

Finally, working through the *RfP* International Standing Commission on Disarmament and Security, we commit to raising awareness of disarmament issues, supporting coordinated advocacy efforts, and engaging and empowering religious leaders and communities to more effectively partner with other civil society, governmental and inter-governmental actors in actions to abolish nuclear weapons.

Resources:

- 1) [Statement in English](#)
- 2) [Statement in Japanese](#)
- 3) [Recorded Speeches](#)
- 4) [Photos](#)