



Opening Remarks

by

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to

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Mayor Aikawa, Mr. Shibayama, Ms. Kawaguchi, Deputy Mayor Toyoda, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to open this twentieth United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in the beautiful City of Saitama. I am especially gratified to be here today in the company of such an auspicious gathering. I understand that the Saitama City symbol is based on the initial letter “S” and signifies the people’s vivid activities to advance a delightful future and that the arcs surrounding the letter “S” symbolize a growing city that warmly embraces its citizens, as well as its visitors, and extends harmony and peace – which is a most appropriate backdrop for our Conference.

This year’s meeting marks the twentieth anniversary of the organization of the first United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Japan. Special appreciation is therefore extended to the Government of Japan for hosting and supporting this Conference over the last two decades and for championing efforts to strengthen and spread international peace and security. Over the years the Conference has developed into a well-respected and internationally recognized forum for constructive and authoritative debate on key issues of the international disarmament agenda.

The leaders and citizens of Saitama, like their counterparts worldwide, are cognizant of the extent to which livelihoods and future destinies are shaped by the forces of globalization in the world today. Some of these forces are economic, some are technological, some are cultural, some relate to the flows of information across national borders, and some relate to security matters.

We are meeting today to address some of the gravest of these security challenges—challenges that are global in scope but have profound effects upon regional stability, and which can only be successfully confronted through concerted international cooperation over an extended period of time.

I contend that conferences such as the one we are attending here today are ideal for promoting international cooperation to address common security concerns by bringing together policy- and decision-makers, as well as experts and civil society, who are working together for the common good of international peace and security. Each one has a role to play to build a safer and more secure world for all. Some through research, some through advocacy, and some through policy formulation and decision-making.

Without question the most serious threats to international peace and security stem from the continued existence of nuclear weapons, the risks of their use, and the dangers associated with their proliferation to additional states, or their acquisition by non-state actors. Having witnessed the devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki sixty-three years ago, the citizens of Japan have consistently been among the most dedicated advocates of efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and to strengthen controls against the proliferation or terrorist use of such weapons.

Japan has consistently used its voice and weight in the First Committee of the General Assembly to advance these objectives. Resolution 62/37 aptly entitled “Renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons”, is Japan’s most recent nuclear disarmament resolution, which was adopted by the General Assembly with overwhelming majority last December. The resolution reaffirms the crucial importance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as the cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime and underscores the importance of its universality in achieving nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation goals. Additionally, it recognizes that the enhancement of international peace and security and the promotion of nuclear disarmament are mutually reinforcing.

It is therefore appropriate that the challenges facing the NPT regime and initiatives to overcome them are the subject of our first plenary session at this conference. I look forward to the presentations and discussions concerning the efforts that are underway to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and the challenges facing the next NPT Review Conference in 2010.

One of the key aims of the NPT is to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and this is fittingly the subject of our second plenary session. The challenge here is longstanding, namely: to ensure that nuclear energy is widely available for peaceful purposes without creating risks of proliferation. The simultaneity of higher energy demands and proliferation concerns has created both political and economic obligations to address questions pertaining to the peaceful use of nuclear energy in a more concrete and urgent manner. Global preparations for what is widely being termed a “nuclear renaissance”—as seen in various plans that have been announced for new reactor construction— have been accompanied by the appearance of a wide variety of proposals to ensure that this will not inadvertently result in a renaissance of nuclear weapons. While some states stress their inalienable right to acquire nuclear energy technology, as long as they are to be used for peaceful purposes, others—including the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency—have offered bold proposals for multilateral control and ownership of sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle. These issues are a worthy focus for stimulating and thorough deliberations at this Conference.

Though these various nuclear challenges are clearly global in scope, they also have profound regional implications, which is the rationale for the choice of the theme of the third plenary session which revolves around the security of East Asia and arms control. Though arms control is by no means limited to nuclear weapons, it remains true that the risks posed by such weapons are so grave and catastrophic that they do merit special consideration at both the international and regional levels. The detonation of a nuclear device in October 2006 by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea served as a powerful reminder of a fundamental truth that the problem of nuclear weapons has both global and regional dimensions—dimensions well worth careful consideration.

Often discussions relating to the challenge of developing responses to nuclear threats come down to the issue of “political will”—who will lead in developing new policy initiatives, what will be their motivations, and what incentives may be needed? While the answer to these questions inevitably focuses on the role of leaders of governments, this response is incomplete, for it fails to account for the reasons why governments choose to act. The fourth plenary session, which deals with the role of civil society in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-

proliferation, will address such questions. An idea that is widely held by the public, persistently advocated in governmental arenas, and promoted by cooperation among diverse groups—such an idea can have an enormous influence upon national policies and, ultimately, could galvanize international collective action. This was true with respect to landmines and in ending atmospheric nuclear tests, and I believe it will also hold true with respect to nuclear disarmament.

Please allow me to close my statement with a personal remark. I have been working at the United Nations in the field of disarmament for many years and I am very proud to be here today on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues. I wish to recognize, and to thank, my former colleague, Mr. Tsutomu Ishiguri, for his many efforts in organizing these conferences in the past and I am very pleased that he is here with us today.

Consistent with the desired goal of past conferences in this series, I hope all participants will have the opportunity to get to know each other, share insights, and perhaps work on joint future initiatives to advance our common goals.

Please accept my very best wishes for a successful and productive Conference. Thank you for your kind attention.

