

**Civil society statement to the UN high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament  
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*Delivered by Joseph Gerson of the American Friends Service Committee on behalf of civil society*

I want to begin by invoking the words of Yamaguchi Senji, one of the most seared and courageous Nagasaki A-bomb survivors, who passed away this summer. Speaking to the Second Special Session on Disarmament thirty-one years ago, he said:

Look at my face and hands. We should never allow people in the world or succeeding generations to suffer deaths and agonies from nuclear war as we, the Hibakusha, have done.

We appeal that now is the time for the UN to draw a comprehensive disarmament program with a specific timetable and with a ban on nuclear weapons as its top priority, and do its utmost to uproot the crisis of nuclear war.

Thirty-one years have passed since Yamaguchi-sensei's heartfelt appeal, and humanity still faces the threat of nuclear annihilation. It has been nearly two decades since the NPT was extended on the basis that the nuclear powers would pursue the "systematic and progressive" reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons globally, yet our survival remains in the balance against the world's estimated 17,000 remaining nuclear weapons. U.S.-Russian discussions on a follow-on to New START have stalled. Other nuclear-armed states, including China, India, and Pakistan, have continued to build up their overall nuclear weapons capabilities. All nuclear-armed states are engaging in or have plans to modernize their nuclear weapons.

We have been more than disappointed by the extremely limited and halting steps taken by the nuclear-armed states to fulfill their nuclear disarmament obligations. We are deeply disturbed by the reality that every nuclear-armed state has prepared for or threatened nuclear attack during wars and international crises; by the first use nuclear attack doctrines of most nuclear-armed states; by the modernizations of nuclear weapons; and by the continuing dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation.

The consequences of nuclear explosions so chillingly described by Nosizwe Baqwa are fundamentally inhuman. They are utterly incompatible with the elementary considerations of humanity that lie at the foundation of international humanitarian law. The implication is inescapable: these weapons must be completely eliminated. As the International Court of Justice made clear, elimination is required by the universally binding legal obligation to engage in good faith negotiation for complete nuclear disarmament. That obligation is rooted not only in the NPT, but in the long history of the United Nations.

Ladies and gentleman, there are no good nuclear weapons and no right hands for them, just as there are no good chemical or biological weapons. The nuclear deterrence policies, belied in large measure by first-use doctrines, are predicated on the willingness and capacity to inflict genocidal or omnicidal destruction. Nuclear weapons do not and cannot bring security. They bring the threat of death and destruction – including for those downwind from nuclear tests and those who do the work of constructing and dismantling the weapons. Nuclear weapons drive proliferation, thus increasing the likelihood of nuclear war. They divert vast and essential resources needed to address real human needs – including the Millennium Development Goals.

We are not dealing with abstractions. Humans and our systems are anything but infallible. Accidents happen. Systems fail. And miscalculations are endemic to the human condition. Today marks the 30th anniversary of the day that Col. Petrov, the duty officer at a nuclear early-warning system command center near Moscow, may have saved humanity by reporting a false alarm when his systems warned that the U.S. had launched a nuclear attack. This year saw the release of an official report advising that cyber attacks may need to be countered by nuclear attacks. Nuclear missile tests have been conducted in the days running up to this

meeting, and one is even scheduled for this very day. Northeast Asia experienced yet another nuclear weapons test as well as simulated nuclear attacks. Also in that region, the world was brought to the brink of war, potentially nuclear war, in an increasingly militarized territorial dispute. Tensions between nuclear powers flared again in South Asia.

It is long past time to begin and to conclude comprehensive negotiations for the time-bound, verified, and irreversible abolition of nuclear weapons. There is no lack of ways and means. A model treaty has been put forward by Malaysia and Costa Rica. This summer in Geneva, the unprecedented UN Open-Ended Working Group held in-depth discussions, with ample civil society participation, of proposals to take forward multilateral negotiations on the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. And the UN Secretary-General has put forward a five-point proposal on nuclear disarmament.

This high-level meeting has provided an opportunity to governments to take these proposals to the next level. Action to implement them needs to begin now. The recent Russian-US agreement on Syria's chemical weapons stocks serves as a reminder of what urgent and committed diplomacy can achieve. Nuclear weapons abolition, which is essential for human survival, should be pursued with the same sense of urgency and dedication.

Here are some key steps:

1. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Presidents Gorbachev and Bush achieved a massive and reciprocal removal of nuclear weapons from deployment without the laborious and obstacle-filled process of treaty negotiation. That is a model to emulate. Such parallel reductions, reinforced by the denuclearization of their nuclear arsenals, would greatly reduce the nuclear threat and stimulate the process of multilateral nuclear weapons abolition by all nuclear-armed states.
2. All modernization of nuclear forces and infrastructure should cease.
3. Comprehensive negotiations for the abolition of nuclear weapons should be commenced without delay. They need not and should not await steps like entry into force of the nuclear test ban treaty and negotiation of a fissile materials treaty.
4. The conference for a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Middle East should be convened, and the world's Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaties should be reinforced by commitments to fully respect them.
5. States free of nuclear weapons have a role and responsibility to demand and work for nuclear abolition. Norway's and Mexico's examples of organizing conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons provide one model. Another is divestment from companies that produce nuclear weapons and their components, a policy now in effect in Norway and New Zealand and introduced as legislation in Switzerland. No one should profit from the production of inhuman, genocidal, and potentially omnicidal weapons.
6. The NPT recognizes that progress in the reduction of military tensions, elimination of biological and chemical weapons, and limitations of so-called "conventional" weapons complements nuclear weapons abolition. Looking forward, limitations on anti-missile systems, cyber warfare, and other high-tech capabilities will also facilitate the complete elimination of all nuclear arsenals and nuclear weapons capabilities.

Each of us, whether head of state, minister, ambassador, activist, or scholar, has agency. Each of us is responsible to our loved ones and to future generations to protect human lives and to preserve the human species. Each of us – to different extents – can impact our nations' policies. On behalf of the world's NGOs working for the abolition of nuclear weapons, I urge you to remember your humanity and take bold actions to eliminate the danger of nuclear war and annihilation. If there are to be No More Hiroshimas, No More Nagasakis, No More Hibakushas, there must be No More Nuclear Weapons!!