

August 2022

Statement on the anniversary of the atomic bombings of 1945

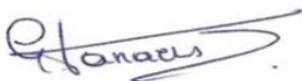
For the 77th year, on August 6 and 9 hearts and minds in every land turn to the two cities destroyed by atomic bombs in 1945. Events this year call special attention to the epoch-making tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. New weaponry and autocratic actions sharpen fears of nuclear annihilation. But concerted efforts show promise that our world can free itself of nuclear weapons. Now, after two years of pandemic delays, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) finds itself in session during the very days of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversaries.

Fears were sharpened early in 2022. With the NPT conference in view, the five recognized nuclear powers reiterated a US-USSR promise which had helped to end the Cold War: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” That was in January. Yet in February, as the invasion of Ukraine loomed, Russian leaders threatened to use their nuclear arsenal. Their nuclear forces were put on high alert. Brandishing nuclear weapons does grave dishonor to all who perished in the atomic attacks of 1945. It also does grave disservice to national majorities worldwide who favor abolishing nuclear weapons. What is more, issuing such threats during a hot war made a mockery of the theory and doctrine of nuclear deterrence which all nuclear powers claim for legitimacy.

Life-saving promises shined, however, a few hundred kilometers west of that war. The new treaty to abolish nuclear weapons met for the first time in Vienna in June. Some 75 governments and 100 civil society organizations from around the world took part. Together in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons they laid foundations for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki testified in Vienna. Importantly, they were not alone. Citizens of the islands and regions used as nuclear test sites joined them—from Kiribati and Kazakhstan, Niue and New Mexico, Marshall Islands, French Polynesia and more. In their autobiographies of radiation, suffering and struggle for human dignity, these people from far corners of the world added their witness to what the Hibakusha of Japan have been saying for 77 years.

The new nuclear ban treaty is already at work. It is uniting the global majority for a nuclear-free world. It is building support for treaty articles which help nuclear test victims and require clean-up work at test sites. Since it came into force last year, 86 countries have already signed it. On this Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversary week, we pray that the work of justice, truth and human dignity may rid the world of nuclear weapons and bear the fruit of peace.



Ms Greet Vanaerschot
Secretary General