

Remarks by Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe
at a Panel event “Voices of Experience”
on the occasion of the Third Preparatory Committee
Of the 2010 NPT Review Conference

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I thank the Global Security Institute, the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Pugwash Conferences for inviting me to this Panel. As I am currently serving as a Research Consultant of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, let me talk about my current experience with the International Commission.

It has become almost a cliché to quote President Obama’s “World Free of Nuclear Weapons” speech in Prague early last month. Almost all of us welcomed the speech and are now very encouraged to feel that the efforts towards nuclear disarmament are finally moving. We cannot fail to seize the momentum now generated and cannot afford to let it fail to reach the ultimate goal.

If there was anything that I did not agree with in the speech President Obama made, it was when he said the “goal would not be reached quickly –perhaps not in his lifetime.” We cannot afford to spend so much time to eliminate nuclear weapons because the danger of nuclear weapon being used will persist that much longer until it is eliminated and we want him to live long enough to see the world free of nuclear weapons.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, or ICNND, is established with a design to re-energize at a high political level the debate about the need for a “nuclear weapons free world” in the run up to the 2010 NPT Review Conference and beyond and to draw a plan for nuclear disarmament that is realistic and practical enough to be able to persuade policy makers to buy the plan. It should not be a plan that may be brushed aside as too idealistic or utopian and just put on a high bookshelf. But still the plan has to be a credible one to be able to persuade nations and peoples aspiring for a nuclear weapons free world that the plan is not just an arms reduction plan stopping short of elimination but a sure plan to bring the world free of nuclear weapons a reality.

The immediate priority for the Commission, therefore, is to help make the 2010 NPT Review Conference a success. Looking back at the dismal results of the previous Review Conference in 2005, I should say the first priority in this respect is to have a clear statement of world commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament. And that from all the five Nuclear Weapon States under the NPT, i.e. the U.S., Russia, the U.K., France and China, prior to the beginning of the next Review Conference, reaffirming their “unequivocal commitment to nuclear disarmament” will be very important. I should suggest that such a statement on nuclear disarmament should best be made at an as high political level as possible.

The unequivocal commitment, then, may be, first, put into practice by bringing the CTBT into force. Again the clear statement by President Obama in Prague to seek the U.S. ratification of the Treaty was a statement by the President of the U.S. long overdue. He also said that he would then work to secure ratification by other key states required for the entry into force of the Treaty. The entry into force of the treaty, or a strong global move towards that direction is an urgent priority now as North Korea has announced it would carry out nuclear tests again and if it does so, it may unravel the precarious concert of nuclear test moratoria that have kept countries from testing nuclear devices for sometime.

The next urgent priority is for the U.S. and Russia to agree on a successor treaty to the START I reducing their strategic nuclear arms substantially. The two nuclear superpowers have been certainly reducing their strategic arsenals over the years but the remaining nuclear arsenals of the U.S. and Russia are estimated to be still in high thousands and so they should be urged to work harder to reach a level close enough to the holding by other NWSs so that all the NWSs may start a collective process of nuclear reduction towards a vantage point from where the world starts the final stage of nuclear elimination.

As the legislators and officials debate the issue of ratifying the CTBT or a major reduction of strategic forces, the issue of the value and utility of nuclear weapons is bound to come up. I would argue that nuclear weapons are such horrible weapons with huge indiscriminate destructions and unmanageable consequences that they are the least useable weapons that any sensible political leader would think of using. If that is so, why spend enormous amount of precious financial resources to obtain and retain them? This devaluing of the value of nuclear weapons is an important issue as we push the case for nuclear disarmament. We have to put the nuclear weapons out of fashion in the 21st

Century.

To this end I would urge people, especially, those political leaders who are in a position to decide possession or use of nuclear weapons to have a correct understanding of the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons visiting exhibition places in Hiroshima or Nagasaki. It is not only the enormous scale of almost-unspeakable destruction, human and physical, but also the long excruciating pains from the radioactivity. The other day the International Commission had a chance to hear directly from the survivors of the bomb. It is important to have a correct perspective of those “survivors.” They were relatively lucky ones who survived because they were 10 or more kilometers away from the epicenter. Otherwise, they would have perished almost instantly by the blasts and that was by relatively small size bombs of ten kiloton equivalent in today’s sense. Now, we have megaton size bombs. And, I also have to remind you that they did not survive 60 some years just happily. They had to suffer from nuclear related illnesses and even after recovering have lived under the constant fear of another onslaught of illness.

Now, let me be back to the NPT Review Conference. I know that another serious cause of the unwieldiness of the NPT Review Conference was the issue of regional disarmament, especially that of the Middle East region. There has been a general support for the idea of MEZFNW or MEZFWMD within the contexts of the UN General Assembly, the NPT Review Conference and the IAEA General Conference but in reality there has been little progress to indicate the zone is to be realized anytime soon. The idea of South Asia Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons has been there for so many years but the realization seems to be a distant dream. Difficulty in these cases is that the regions contain NPT outsiders that possess or is suspected to possess nuclear weapons.

The question of NPT outsiders has been in existence for many years but the recent developments, especially the approval of the U.S.-India deal by the international groups made the question of incorporating those NPT outsiders into world nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation contexts a practical issue that need to be settled as a real-time issue. The NSG, for example, will be asked how to deal with Pakistani and Israeli questions in relation to the Indian handling. This is an area where the International Commission is expected to come up with a good answer.

One answer I would suggest is to start involving all those who possess nuclear weapons, irrespective of their standing vis-à-vis the NPT or any other legal or political

framework. To achieve a world without nuclear weapons you have to have all those who possess nuclear weapons to give up them. As a practical matter, if one's neighbor or potential adversary continues to possess nuclear weapons, it becomes difficult for that country to commit itself to renounce nuclear weapons, or to keep on reducing its nuclear holdings. This is why Foreign Minister Nakasone of Japan in his recent statement proposed "nuclear disarmament steps by all states holding nuclear weapons" and I advocate what I call a universal nuclear disarmament for this purpose. Indeed, the U.S. and Russian arsenals are still huge and so quantitatively they have to take a lead in reducing nuclear stocks but I wish to see all those who possess nuclear weapons to share the same commitment to nuclear disarmament and express it in a tangible way suiting each one of them. I will soon be coming up with a kind of list of homework for each one of those nuclear possessors. For some numerical reduction is important, for some transparency, for some test moratorium, fissile material production. You name it. Homework is different for each student.

After those immediate priorities the Commission has to address next priority issues, the kind of steps that will bring the nations close to a nuclear vantage point where they can have a prospect for ultimate nuclear elimination. The process at this stage definitely has to be a universal process to cover all the nuclear weapon possessors and has to involve not only "strategic nuclear weapons" but also what they call "non-strategic nuclear weapons." The countries at this stage have to stop production of fissile material for weapons and start considering a legally binding instrument to eliminate all the fissile material for nuclear weapons. This in fact may become a precursor to a nuclear weapons convention.

Last of all, for such a commission as what I may now call Evans-Kawaguchi Commission, important question is not only to come up with such a realistic and credible plan for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation but also a plan that will be pursued and implemented after it is issued. I have seen so many reports so far. Canberra Commission, Tokyo Forum, Blix Commission, IAEA 2020 reports. There have been enough good reports but the question is none of them is very much implemented so far. I think the International Commission should have a device to follow through its report to pursue its implementation.

To achieve the aim of nuclear weapons free world is certainly not an easy task. But we cannot afford to give up on this. We have to unite our forces to overcome the

difficulties involved. And so I would very much welcome your suggestions and ideas to achieve the common objective that we share together.

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