

## **Emerging from the nuclear shadow**

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"At any given moment in history, precious few voices are heard crying out for justice. But, now more than ever, those voices must rise above the din of violence and hatred."

These are the memorable words of Dr. Joseph Rotblat, who for many years led the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, a global organization working for peace and for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Rotblat passed away last year in August, the month that marked the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was 96. In the final phase of his life, he consistently voiced his strong sense of foreboding about the chronic lack of progress toward nuclear disarmament and the growing threat of nuclear proliferation.

The startling development of military technology has entirely insulated acts of war from human realities and feelings. In an instant, irreplaceable lives are lost and beloved homelands reduced to ruin. The anguished cries of victims and their families are silenced or ignored. Within this vast system of violence -- at the peak of which are poised nuclear weapons -- humans are no longer seen as embodiments of life. They are reduced to the status of mere things.

In the face of these severe challenges, there is a spreading sense of powerlessness and despair within the international community, a readiness to dismiss the possibility of nuclear abolition as a mere pipe dream.

Peace is a competition between despair and hope, between disempowerment and committed persistence. To the degree that powerlessness takes root in people's consciousness, there is a greater tendency to resort to force. Powerlessness breeds violence.

But it was human beings that gave birth to these instruments of hellish destruction. It cannot be beyond the power of human wisdom to eliminate them.

The Pugwash Conferences that were Rotblat's base of action were first held in 1957, a year that saw a rapid acceleration in the nuclear arms race that came to engulf the entire planet. On Sept. 8 of the same year, my mentor, Josei Toda, issued a call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The day was blessed with the kind of beautiful clear sky that follows a typhoon, as Toda made his declaration at a gathering of some 50,000 young people in Yokohama:

"Today a global movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen. It is my wish to go further; I want to expose and remove the claws that lie hidden in the depths of such weapons. . . . Even if a certain country should conquer the world using nuclear weapons, the people who used those weapons should be condemned as demons and devils."

Toda chose to denounce nuclear weapons in such harsh, even strident, terms because he was determined to expose their essential nature as an absolute evil -- one that denies and undermines humankind's collective right to live.

Toda's impassioned call issued from a philosophical understanding of life's inner workings: He was warning against the demonic egotism that seeks to bend others to our will. He saw this writ large in the desire of states to possess these weapons of ultimate destruction.

The idea that nuclear weapons function to deter war and are therefore a "necessary evil" is a core impediment to their elimination; it must be challenged and dismantled.

Because Toda saw nuclear weapons as an absolute evil, he was able to transcend ideology and national interest; he was never confused by the arguments of power politics. Today, half a century later, the language of nuclear deterrence and "limited" nuclear war is again in currency. I am convinced that Toda's soul-felt cry, rooted in the deepest dimensions of life, now shines with an even brighter universal brilliance.

If we are to eliminate nuclear weapons, a fundamental transformation of the human spirit is essential. Since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki more than 60 years ago, the survivors have transformed despair into a sense of mission as they have continued to call out for nuclear abolition. As people living

today, it is our shared responsibility -- our duty and our right -- to act as heirs to this lofty work of inner transformation, to expand and elevate it into a struggle to eliminate war itself.

In 1982, as Cold War tensions mounted, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) organized the exhibition "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. It toured 16 countries, including the Soviet Union and China and other nuclear weapons states. It was viewed by some 1.2 million visitors in total. SGI members also actively participated in the global Abolition 2000 campaign. The purpose of these and other efforts has been to arouse the hearts of people seeking peace.

To further deepen this type of grassroots solidarity, I would like to call for the creation of a U.N. Decade of Action by the World's People for Nuclear Abolition and for the early convening of a World Summit for Nuclear Abolition. Such steps would both reflect and support an emerging international consensus for disarmament.

Needless to say, it is young people who bear the challenges and possibilities of the future. It would therefore be valuable to hold a gathering of youth representatives from around the world prior to the annual U.N. General Assembly, giving world leaders an opportunity to hear the views of the next generation.

Affording young people such venues and opportunities to engage as world citizens is critical to building the long-term foundations for peace.

Crying out in opposition to war and nuclear weapons is neither emotionalism nor self-pity. It is the highest expression of human reason based on an unflinching perception of the dignity of life.

Faced with the horrifying facts of nuclear proliferation, we must call forth the power of hope from within the depths of each individual's life. This is the power that can transform even the most intractable reality.

To emerge from the shadow of nuclear weapons we need a revolution in the consciousness of countless individuals -- a revolution that gives rise to the heartfelt confidence that "There is something I can do." Then, finally, we will see

a coming together of the world's people, and hear their common voice, their cry for an end to this terrible madness of destruction.