

Civil society must push nuke ban

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Last year, important international conferences were held to tackle such pressing global challenges as climate change and nuclear disarmament. While these conferences saw the emergence of constructive new consensus, it is not enough simply to sound the alarm: The time has come for action and solidarity.

Where there is an absence of international political leadership, civil society should step in to fill the gap, providing the energy and vision needed to move the world in a new and better direction.

I believe that we need a paradigm shift, a recognition that the essence of leadership is found in ordinary individuals — whoever and wherever they may be — standing up and fulfilling the role that is theirs alone to play.

Focusing on the goal of nuclear weapons abolition, I would like to propose three areas in which civil society can make an important contribution.

1. We must press all states possessing nuclear weapons to move quickly toward their complete elimination.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has called for the regular convening, starting this year, of a Security Council summit on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

I fully support this call. In addition, I propose that participation be opened to states that have chosen to relinquish their nuclear weapons or programs. Specialists in the field and representatives of nongovernmental organizations should also have the opportunity to address these summits. Such gatherings should work to develop concrete means and paths toward a world free of nuclear weapons, with 2015 as their immediate goal.

In April last year, a meeting of former heads of state and government was held in Hiroshima. Participants visited the Peace Memorial Museum and heard the testimony of atomic bomb victims (hibakusha). They issued a communique that

stressed the importance of world leaders, especially those of nuclear-weapon states, visiting Hiroshima.

In this spirit, I propose that Hiroshima and Nagasaki be the host cities for the 2015 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, which would also serve as a nuclear abolition summit. If government leaders together witnessed the realities of the atomic bombings, this would most certainly solidify their resolve.

2. We must take steps to prevent further nuclear weapons development or modernization.

Here, bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force is crucial. This will prohibit — as an expression of the will of the international community — nuclear testing in perpetuity; it will also strengthen the psychological foundations for nuclear weapons abolition.

To achieve this, it is necessary for a number of key countries that have not yet done so to ratify the treaty.

I would like to propose a series of interlocking agreements of mutual obligation to secure the signing and/or ratification of the CTBT within a fixed period. This could take the form, for example, of a bilateral commitment to sign by India and Pakistan and a tripartite agreement for mutual ratification by Egypt, Iran and Israel.

In Northeast Asia, negotiations should be pursued through the six-party talks for an agreement by which the United States and China ratify the CTBT, a zone is established in which all parties pledge the nonuse of nuclear weapons, and North Korea signs and ratifies the CTBT and abandons its nuclear weapons programs.

3. We must work for the adoption of a Nuclear Weapons Convention comprehensively prohibiting these most inhumane of all weapons.

As the Final Document adopted by the 2010 NPT Review Conference suggests, these weapons are fundamentally incompatible with the principles of international humanitarian law. This is the awareness we must foster and

spread. It was to this end that the youth members of Soka Gakkai collected more than 2.2 million signatures in support of a Nuclear Weapons Convention; these were presented to the representatives of the president of the NPT Review Conference and the U.N. secretary general.

In September 2010, Malaysia and Costa Rica put forward a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly seeking the start of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. This passed with the support of more than 130 states, including China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. If global civil society can raise its voice and increase its presence, bringing about a profound shift in international public opinion, this would be a force that no government could ignore.

The crucial thing is to arouse the awareness that as a matter of human conscience we can never permit the people of any country to fall victim to nuclear weapons, and for each individual to express their refusal to continue living in the shadow of the threat they pose. We must each make a personal decision and determination to build a new world free of nuclear weapons.

An NWC would thus represent a kind of world law — drawing its ultimate authority and legitimacy from the expressed will of the world's peoples: It would bear the imprimatur of each of the world's citizens.

The three challenges I have discussed here require a change in attitude on the part of states. Even more crucially, they require the passionate commitment and action of awakened citizens.

I believe that we must maintain pride in the knowledge that the actions we take, based on our own decisions and choices as individuals, link directly to the magnificent challenge of transforming human history.

Today we stand at a watershed moment. We have before us the potential to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end. We must not allow this historic opportunity to pass.