

A Last Request as Chairman

I am grateful for this opportunity to write one last article for *Peace Culture*, and I am delighted that I can be the bearer of good news.

In early March, I spent a week in Oslo, Norway. The first two days were spent with Aaron Tovish, Jackie Cabasso, and Pol D'Huyvetter. These three Peace Culture Foundation executive advisors are the people who, more than anyone else except former Mayor Akiba, have built Mayors for Peace into the large, effective global network it is today. They will all continue as employees of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, and they will be doing their best to advise and build Mayors for Peace. I will not say anything here about our discussions because we covered matters that will be deliberated and decided at the Mayors for Peace General Conference to be held here in Hiroshima August 3 to 6 this year. Stay tuned.

After our internal meetings, the four of us attended the ICAN conference (March 2 and 3). The organizers of this conference were hoping to draw 400 participants. They got over 500 campaigners of all ages from all over the world, including Latin America and Africa. This group generated an energetic discussion focused on helping the courageous nations of the “new movement” to proceed as quickly as possible toward our common goal: an international treaty that clearly de-legitimizes and bans the production, possession and use of nuclear weapons.

The reason 500 campaigners gathered in cold, distant and extremely expensive Oslo is the “new movement.” This movement emerged in Vienna last May at the first preparatory committee meeting for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. There, Switzerland read a revolutionary statement endorsed by 16 countries. That statement declared that nuclear weapons are too dangerous, that is, they

are terrible weapons the use of which would have enormous, horribly destructive consequences for all humanity.

So, you might be asking, “What’s revolutionary about that? Here in Hiroshima we’ve been saying this for 68 years.” From Hiroshima’s point of view, the content of the statement is not revolutionary. What is revolutionary is that the non-nuclear-weapon states, that is, countries with no nuclear weapons, are taking control of the nuclear disarmament process.

At a disarmament conference in Shizuoka at the end of January, Switzerland said openly from the stage that three nuclear weapon states had scolded it for the statement it presented in Vienna. In effect, Switzerland was telling the world that the nuclear-weapon states don’t like the new movement, but it will continue anyway. This is revolutionary.

The Swiss statement was presented again in the UN General Assembly in New York in October. That time, the revolution was endorsed by 35 countries. Then came the conference in Oslo. ICAN activists were quite nervous about this conference. What if no one showed up? What if it drew only the same 35 countries that signed the statement in New York? A failure like that could mean death to the new movement. Fortunately, 132 countries registered for the conference and 127 actually sent delegations. The movement is growing! In fact, the best outcome of the Oslo conference was the announcement by Mexico that it will hold another conference on humanitarian consequences sometime this year. And after Mexico, the next one will be somewhere in Africa.

The statement that came out of the Oslo Conference, like the statements in Vienna and New York, basically said that nuclear weapons are too destructive and dangerous and we should make them illegal. Some activists complained about the content. “We’ve known this since Hiroshima, and now we’re supposed

to get excited about ‘humanitarian consequences?’” True, the words are not exciting, but the meaning is. I’m excited because a majority of countries are carefully and politely saying to the countries that have nuclear weapons or want them or are hiding under nuclear umbrellas, “Stop threatening us. Don’t talk to us about deterrence. Don’t talk to us about your national interests or national security. You have no right under any circumstances whatsoever to destroy human civilization on this planet. You have been promising for over 40 years to get rid of your nuclear weapons, and we’re tired of waiting. So to help you along, we will make it perfectly clear that those weapons are illegal and immoral, and we want them gone. Now, gentlemen, start your negotiations!”

This revolutionary new movement is being boycotted and actively opposed by the nuclear-weapon states, and yet, it’s growing and getting stronger. Eventually, it will lead to a treaty banning nuclear weapons. And when that treaty is written and offered publicly for signature, the campaign for a nuclear-weapon-free world will finally shift into high gear. I can’t wait!

This is the good news. The bad news is that the Japanese government is on the wrong side of the revolution. Rather than wholeheartedly supporting the new movement, Japan seems to be defending the nuclear-weapon states. In Oslo, the Japanese representative called for a “gradual, realistic approach.” By “realistic” he meant an approach that would be supported by the nuclear-weapon states. Japan’s Foreign Ministry has said that the new movement is a distraction from the step-by-step approach that has been working so well. But this step-by-step approach has left us with 19,000 nuclear weapons and a world in which those weapons are spreading and increasingly likely to be used. They have also said that a nuclear weapons ban that does not involve the nuclear-weapon states is meaningless. If that’s true, why doesn’t Japan just support the new movement to maintain its reputation as a country that seeks a nuclear-weapon-free world? If the new movement is meaningless, why not go along? The fact is, Japan and

the nuclear-weapon states oppose the movement because they know it is profoundly meaningful. They are afraid of it.

At this point, the Japanese government has doubts about the new movement probably because they want to avoid conflict with the US. However, they did the same thing with the anti-personnel landmine ban presented in 1997 that now has 162 signatory states. Japan opposed the landmine ban at first, but when a strong grassroots campaign made it clear that the Japanese people were overwhelmingly in favor of the ban, the Japanese government signed in December 1998.

So this is my last request of you, the readers of *Peace Culture*. Between now and 2015 you will be hearing more and more about the “new movement” or “the ban.” As this campaign emerges, please act. Write to Mayor Matsui, Governor Yuzaki, your local City Councilman or woman, your Diet representative, Foreign Minister Kishida, and Prime Minister Abe. Let them know that you want them to support the new movement, the ban, the start of negotiations and a nuclear-weapon-free world

This campaign is important for the world and for Japan. If Japan wholeheartedly supports the new movement, it will succeed quickly. If Japan refuses to support the new movement, the movement will be greatly weakened, and Japan will be considered a traitor to the cause of abolition.

The stated reason for the new movement is the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.” If the country that knows the most about these humanitarian consequences, the country of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima, fails to support this movement, no one will ever trust Japan again when it comes to disarmament. Japan will have chosen the nuclear umbrella over a nuclear-weapon-free world, and many will immediately assume that

Japan is planning to obtain nuclear weapons. Japan could lose a lot of friends over this, and in the long run, those friends will be more important than the nuclear industry.

The Japanese government **MUST** support the new abolitionist movement, and your voices will be crucial. The only force that can cause the Japanese government to support a treaty opposed by the US and the nuclear industry is a determined demand from the overwhelming majority of the Japanese people. If you truly want to see a world without nuclear weapons, the time has come to lift your voices and tell your government to side with the revolution, not the nuclear status quo.

In closing, I thank you for six years of friendship. I have no words to adequately express my gratitude for your interest, your letters of support, your invitations to speak in your area, and your ongoing concern for the Hiroshima, the Peace Culture Foundation, and a nuclear-weapon-free peace. I look forward to seeing you and working with you again in my new capacity as professor at Hiroshima Jogakuin University. See you in September.

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