

Religious Leaders Statement

delivered by Most Venerable Gijun Sugitani, Religions for Peace

We are grateful that the vision of a world without nuclear weapons has been compellingly revived in recent years through a welcome series of statements and challenges by eminent figures on the global security stage. And we are convinced that the States now gathering for the eighth Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have a unique opportunity to bring that vision significantly closer to fulfillment.

Our religious traditions affirm the ultimate value of each human life and call us to respect all life. They warn that nuclear weapons place earthly life in our all-too-human hands. Possessing them, we claim the globe as acceptable collateral for selfish interests. The ethical consequence is that to be human is to be responsible to the god in which we believe. Where humanity is inclined to be selfish and violent, proud and wasteful, the fact that we are under this authority calls us to humility and stewardship; to a wisdom greater than individual or national self-interest.

Furthermore, as the A-bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have suffered from the aftereffects of the radioactivity of the A-bomb, nuclear weapons also give lifelong suffering to victims. We believe that the use of nuclear weapons, whether possessed by states or terrorist organizations, inherently immoral, and their existence itself must be denied. Such weapons should be eliminated once and for all.

The United States and Russia carry the heaviest weight of responsibility to set an ambitious pace down that path. We are therefore especially pleased that President's Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev have jointly and unequivocally affirmed a common goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons. They now face the challenge of bringing their respective national policies and postures into alignment with that vision and broadening that vision to include other States that possess or covet such weapons.

We believe that nuclear disarmament will have to be codified through a single global convention that can both promote and verify a complete ban on nuclear weapons. While the timing for pursuing such a convention must be carefully considered, we are convinced that this is the moment to establish the technical and legal details to facilitate total nuclear disarmament and to set specific timelines for achieving the realistic goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We urge the NPT Review Conference to facilitate such an effort.

The faith-based partners of Religions for Peace understand that we have our own role to play in encouraging our respective faith communities to become part of a great global movement for nuclear disarmament.

We recognize that the world now faces a variety of critical security challenges, including many that do not directly involve weapons of mass destruction -- economic crises, climate change, energy deficits, acute water shortages, unrelenting hunger, grossly inadequate health services, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and more. These and other security challenges create misery and uncertainty in the global community but also allow nuclear weapons states to justify the continued possession of their deadly arsenals.

We in the religious community can do more to help eliminate these security-related excuses for

possessing or acquiring nuclear weapons, and we pledge to do so. We strongly advocate that rather than ensuring security, nuclear weapons compromise security. We pledge to advance a truer understanding of what it means to be safe; one in which armaments hold little value. Each person's vulnerability is an invitation to approach others with compassion. Our inter-relatedness calls us to cooperate to protect all persons and our earth. Today, my security depends on yours and no one is safer than the most vulnerable among us. We emphasize that this lingering idea that nuclear weapons can protect people is what allows the continued possession of nuclear weapons.