Message
By Daisaku Ikeda
President, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Mr. Yasuyoshi Komizo, Chairperson of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, noble-minded youth from throughout the world, friends.

It is my privilege to offer this message on behalf of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), one of the participating organizations, on the significant occasion of the holding of this International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition, here in Hiroshima, a city of eternal commitment to and inspiration for peace.

First please allow me to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to the many civil society organizations whose endeavors have made this Summit possible.

I have long been convinced of the importance of marking the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings by holding such a summit meeting at the site of these attacks. I welcome the holding of this extremely significant Summit and wish you all success in your deliberations.

I believe this gathering can signal the effective end of the era of nuclear weapons. For in the earnest actions of youthful leaders, joining their efforts to those of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we sense an unmatched passion to develop new pathways toward the goal of nuclear abolition. We feel your unwavering conviction, the unfettered expanse of your wisdom.

Youth are the embodiment of indomitable creativity. You are capable of infinitely expanding solidarity. You are the eternal source of all renewal.

On this occasion, I would like to reflect, together with you, on the history of the Atomic Bomb Dome, whose form has become a powerful symbol conveying to the people of the world the cruelty and inhumanity of nuclear weapons. The history of this building was the subject of a special exhibition to mark its centennial that was recently held at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. I believe its history contains lessons that we must
all bear in mind as a lesson and pattern for the future.

When the Hiroshima Prefectural Commercial Exhibition Hall, set against the backdrop of the Motoyasu River, opened in August 1915, the sight of its bright, chalk-white form reaching into the sky inspired the admiration of the citizens.

But from the moment of its birth, this building was already darkened by the shadow of war.

The year that work began on this architectural masterpiece saw the outbreak of World War I in Europe. Jan Letzel, who had been commissioned by the prefectural governor to design the building, was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as such became an enemy national. His movements were subjected to various restrictions and he was unable to attend the dedication ceremony when the Hall was completed the following year.

For a brief time, the Hall was the focus of cultural activities such as art exhibitions and concerts. But following the outbreak of war with China in the 1930s, the events held there took on an increasingly wartime tone. Eventually, the large gates designed by Jan Letzel were removed and melted down to support the war effort. All the exhibition rooms were converted to offices for wartime administration.

Then, thirty years after the Hall opened, on August 6, 1945, it was devastated by the enormous heat and force of the explosion of the atomic bomb, whose hypocenter was just 160 meters to the southeast.

The history of the Atomic Bomb Dome is powerful testimony to war’s capacity to drive wedges of division between people, to negate human dignity, to propel society away from culture and toward violence. The inhumanity of war in all its aspects is only too evident. War seizes people in its inescapable grasp, robs them of the precious gift of life and leaves survivors to struggle with irredeemable suffering and misery.

Even more unforgivable are nuclear weapons, which can in an instant end countless numbers of lives, obliterating in seconds the fruit of long ages of people’s effort to construct their societies. Those who have been exposed to radiation must then endure lifetimes of indescribable suffering and
wounded dignity. Nuclear weapons are truly an absolute evil, the manifestation of an ultimate inhumanity.

With great courage and fortitude, the survivors of the nuclear attacks have continued to share their experiences, to bring to mind and speak of things they would no doubt prefer never to recollect. In this, they have been motivated by the noble wish that no one, anywhere, experience the suffering they have endured. It is this that has given them voice and impelled them to demand that nuclear weapons never be used again.

As many as 114 countries have formally endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge, vowing to take action toward the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons in light of their inhumane nature. Building on this growing international solidarity among governments and civil society, we must use the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings to foster concrete undertakings toward the realization of a world free from nuclear weapons.

The youth who have gathered here, and all the members of your generation, have a decisive and crucial role to play in generating this new current in history.

This past August 12, on International Youth Day, Special Envoy Alhendawi declared that young people “are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they are also the leaders of today.” Indeed, the power and passion of youth is the source of the hope that can break down the walls that confine us to our present reality, the hope that can open the way to a new era.

Among the youth attending this Summit are representatives from countries that have endured the damage caused by nuclear weapons tests. Their experience confirms the fact that even when nuclear weapons are not used in war, irreparable harm has been inflicted simply to develop and maintain them.

In this sense, not only is the effort to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons indispensable to a world without war; its potential goes even beyond that. By challenging at its deepest sources the way of thinking that regards nuclear weapons as a necessary evil, we can contain the
proliferation of cruelty and inhumanity in the many forms these take in our world. We can challenge the fundamental inhumanity of ways of thinking and acting in which the ends are seen to justify the means, in which nations pursue their own prosperity at the cost of the suffering of other societies, in which present actions are taken with no thought to future impacts. The struggle to eliminate nuclear weapons is, in other words, the struggle to create a global society in which all people live in peace, mutually celebrating and bringing forth each other’s inherent dignity.

To quote one second-generation hibakusha from Hiroshima, a mother: Efforts for world peace must start by establishing happiness in the life of each individual.

The future of humankind will be determined by the depth of the pledge, or vow, that is the vital pulse in each of your young lives as you celebrate your own existence along with the existence of others, as you victoriously advance along the path of happiness and peace.

It is my fervent hope that this Summit will further expand and strengthen the global solidarity of youth, and become the starting point for effective new efforts to transform the world and bring a new era into being.

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