Message to the participants at the International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition
Hiroshima, 30 August 2015

Seventy years after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki revealed to the world the horror of a new age of warfare and the terrifying possibility of the destruction of human civilization, it is depressingly clear that decades of efforts on nuclear disarmament have failed. Despite the earnest promises, solemn commitments and “unequivocal undertakings” from nuclear-armed states and their allies (including Japan), serious efforts to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and to take genuine steps towards their elimination have yet to begin. Sadly, this is not just the fault of governments; civil society organizations have been unwittingly complicit in persisting with unsuccessful approaches, and thus helping to preserve the status quo.

If nuclear weapons are ever to be eliminated, this must change. And change will not come from the older generations: even those with the best of intentions are fixed in their ways, and have too much invested in strategies that have led nowhere. Change will only come when young people dare to depart in new directions; to challenge orthodoxy and tradition; to ignore condescension, scepticism and dismissal; and to forge ahead with bold, creative, disruptive, dangerous ideas.

So I urge you to approach this summit with a sense of determination, daring, irreverence and adventure. Ask difficult questions, including to yourselves. Consider the improbable, the unconventional, the uncomfortable, the subversive and the absurd. And remember these words from double Nobel laureate Linus Pauling:

“When an old and distinguished person speaks to you, listen to him carefully and with respect — but do not believe him. Never put your trust into anything but your own intellect. Your elder, no matter whether he has gray hair or has lost his hair, no matter whether he is a Nobel laureate — may be wrong. The world progresses, year by year, century by century, as the members of the younger generation find out what was wrong among the things that their elders said. So you must always be skeptical — always think for yourself.”

I wish you an inspiring, exhilarating and life-changing summit.

Richard Lennane
Chief Inflammatory Officer