



What Is Required of Us?

Rev. Dr Sang Chang

WCC Asia President, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea

*Session II: Actions for Nuclear Disarmament Hereafter, “War Never Again” Nuclear Disarmament Symposium
Hiroshima, 6 August 2015*

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is a sobering privilege to be together in this city today. It is just after 4:00 in the afternoon, and each second of this August day has had a thousand stories of human tragedy to tell. If we could travel back in time 70 years right now, we would see scorched earth in every direction, families of instant casualties and vanished people, a city eight hours after the end of a world. How compelling it is, a lifetime later, that the threat of what happened here still hangs over us all. How fitting that this session is dedicated to “Actions for Nuclear Disarmament.” How urgent is our common task!

These remarks are titled “What is Required of Us?” I will speak of “us” as three concentric circles. The first circle is our own identity and faith. The second circle includes other identities and religions. The third circle is all of humanity.

While I speak of “What is Required of Us,” please ask yourself if there are parallels in your tradition to the points I am offering. Does what nuclear disarmament requires of *me* as a Christian compare with what nuclear disarmament requires of *you* as a Buddhist or a Muslim or a Hindu or a Jew?

LIVE THE COURAGE OF OUR CONVICTIONS

The first thing that is required of us is to live the courage of our convictions. For the World Council of Churches (WCC), our conviction is that the world must be freed of nuclear weapons.

For us, two foundational positions have emerged. The first position was articulated not long after this city was destroyed, when the WCC was founded in 1948. At its founding, the WCC adopted a broad rejection of war and armed violence in the modern era, predicated on the international rule of law. It called for the internationalization of the rule of law as the basis for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts. The churches also made a prophetic statement that, while the enforcement of law may require the use of force, modern warfare uses force in ways that tend to destroy the basis on which law exists.

The second basic position has emerged slowly, over many decades. It is a deepening conviction that violence is in no regard to be legitimized by religion. Christian approaches to war, disarmament, peace and security must undergo a deliberate and radical shift. The crux of this conviction is that churches and nations must put many times more energy and talents into building peace and preventing violence than into allowing, accepting or justifying wars and armed conflicts. Churches have come to recognize that working for peace constitutes a primary expression of Christian responsibility in the world. They are challenged to move beyond rhetorical denunciations of violence, oppression and injustice, and to incarnate their ethical judgments into actions that contribute to a culture of peace. We believe that this responsibility for action is grounded in the goodness of all that God has created, and in the essential goodness of all of humanity by virtue of being made in God’s image.

The WCC approach to nuclear weapons draws on these foundations. We reject nuclear weapons categorically, as a challenge to all of humanity including us, our churches and our societies.

Our convictions about nuclear weapons are tested regularly. In 2013 the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place here in Northeast Asia, in the region where nuclear explosions, accidents

and threats have taken a heavy toll. Northeast Asia is the only place on earth where nuclear weapons have been used in warfare. More than 1,000 nuclear bombs were tested in adjoining regions during the Cold War. All states in the region either possess nuclear weapons today or depend on the nuclear arsenal of the United States. Actions for nuclear disarmament must focus on facts like this.

People from this region influenced the assembly. Living close to nuclear power plants and inside the target zones of opposing nuclear forces, they called for replacing nuclear power here as a step toward sustainable development, and for eliminating nuclear weapons as a step toward peace.¹ The World Council of Churches took up their call.

The WCC believes that nuclear weapons cannot be reconciled with real peace. They inflict unspeakable suffering and wreak destruction which cannot be bound by space or time. If a hundred bombs like the one used against Hiroshima were used on cities today, soot from the incinerated cities would disrupt the global climate and agriculture so severely that up to two billion people could perish.² Nuclear weapons pose unacceptable threats to humanity. It is our conviction that the only way to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again is to eliminate the weapons themselves.

We listen when the *hibakusha* of Hiroshima bear witness in the hope that no one else will ever suffer their fate. We also listen to the *hibakusha* of Fukushima decrying nuclear power. We are convinced that Christians must listen to these witnesses and make their witness our own.

We believe that their fate is related to how human beings are called to live: We must live in ways that protect life instead of putting it at risk, neither living fearfully, defended by nuclear weapons, nor living wastefully, dependent on nuclear energy.

We are convinced that using the energy of the atom in ways that threaten and destroy life is a sinful misuse of God's creation. In the 1990s, when the Sahtu-Dene people of northern Canada finally learned that uranium from their lands had been used in the bombs that destroyed this city and Nagasaki, they sent a delegation of elders here to apologize. We believe that we all have to be such witnesses. Let all faiths join together and refuse to accept that the mass destruction of other peoples can be a legitimate form of protection for ourselves.

Let us make that our collective witness in word and deed. Living the courage of conviction in this field requires us to reflect and to act; to pray for peace and also to pursue peace; to carry out our religious ceremonies and to fulfil our civic duties.

UNITE WITH OTHERS IN FOCUSED ACTION

The second thing that is required of us is to translate our beliefs into focused actions which we implement with others. In an increasingly pluralistic world, that is the way to become agents for constructive change. This approach can save and protect lives. Despite the wars and armed violence of the past century, new humanitarian norms have been built to ban chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, laser weapons, landmines and cluster munitions.

Achieving a similar, humanitarian ban on the world's deadliest weapon will not be easy. Yet progress is clearly being made, and we all need to play our part. On one side of the issue, the few nuclear-armed states continue to insist that *their* security requires nuclear weapons. They are ignoring their treaty obligation to get rid of nuclear weapons and are modernizing their arsenals for many more decades of use instead. On other side of the issue, a new global constituency for abolition is steadily transforming the nuclear debate. Governments, international organizations, civil society campaigns and religious networks are collectively delegitimizing nuclear weapons because of their health, humanitarian and environmental consequences. The legitimacy and prestige associated with nuclear weapons is eroding as a result.

What happened here 70 years ago began a new chapter in the ethics of irresponsibility. The imperative now is to redeem our era. We must act on the fact that our own fate is linked to the fate of others as never before in human history. In the two years leading up to this 70th anniversary, a series of global conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have made that imperative clear in new ways. The conferences helped to narrow the gaps between what is commonly known about nuclear weapons, their actual effects, and the societal condemnation they deserve. These giant seminars, hosted by Norway, Mexico and Austria, demonstrated that nothing exposes the unacceptable contradictions about nuclear weapons better than the facts about nuclear weapons.

These and other recent events show that more and more states without nuclear weapons and more and more groups in society are standing up for their obligation to eliminate nuclear weapons. In fact, 124 states attended the first humanitarian impact conference; 145 states took part in the second conference, and 158 states participated in the third. In May this year, 159 governments declared, “It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.”³ When that statement was first made three years ago, only 14 states joined. International organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN organizations, civil society and academia are all shouldering responsibility and sharing expertise for the abolition of nuclear arms.

This growing momentum is increasingly focused on a long-standing gap that “protects” nuclear weapons. All other weapons of mass destruction have been banned. Yet the most destructive of all weapons – nuclear weapons – has not been banned. Closing this “legal gap” is the next logical step in the build-up of momentum of the past three years. Fortunately, a new Humanitarian Pledge is providing a pathway so that solution-minded states can join in closing that gap together. The pledge calls on all states to “fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”. 112 states have now endorsed it. All governments must be urged and asked to do the same.

What is required of us comes into urgent focus here. The basic reality mobilizing so many different sectors of society is unacceptable impacts of nuclear weapons on people and the planet. UN agencies responsible for health, development, human rights, migration, refugees, weather and disaster relief are all contributing. Climatologists, physicians, gender researchers, risk analysts, agronomists and emergency officers are all giving evidence. So are philosophers, ethicists and religious leaders. Yet the door is open for many more. The door is open for more of us to share the courage of our convictions.

What is required of people of faith is for us to raise our voices. Religious leaders must provide leadership. People of faith from every walk of life must take action. Nuclear disarmament now – on the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings – requires us to focus faith, ethics and morality on the need for an urgent new international law. That law is a legal ban on nuclear weapons, achieved with the widest possible international backing.

The five-percent of states that have nuclear weapons are strong, but they are not strong because of their nuclear weapons. The 95-percent of states armed with the facts about nuclear weapons are stronger than the states that hang onto the weapons and deny the facts about them.

From experience in mobilizing member churches in 140 countries, the World Council of Churches is convinced of the importance of world religions *working within our own religion*. We find that mobilizing our own membership is a pre-requisite for whatever success we may achieve and also for contributing to wider success.

Uniting with others in focused action requires more than that, however. We must also *work with other religions*. We do this of course. Probably everyone here today does this. But couldn't we all do more?

Uniting with others in focused action also requires us to *work with civil society organizations*. Much more of this cooperation is possible – especially at the national and local level, where civil society is strongest. Two years ago, when our common goal in every region was an effective global Arms Trade Treaty, 50 governments heard from churches empowered in part by collaboration with civil society. We have seen that when churches with global leadership also work with partners in their own society, faith-based advocacy takes on new power.

Uniting with others in focused action requires us to *work with governments*. There is a good chance your government is part of the world majority against nuclear weapons or would like to be part of it. They need your support to follow that right path. There are many ways to approach governments. 95 countries have members of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. 112 countries, as noted, have signed the Humanitarian Pledge. 115 countries are part of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones. 156 countries do not rely on nuclear weapons. 158 countries support the joint statement saying of nukes, “never again.” 187 countries do not have nuclear weapons.

I would like to point out that the WCC delegates here come from churches in two countries that have nuclear weapons – the United States and Pakistan – and five countries that profess support for nuclear disarmament while continuing to accept protection from nuclear weapons. Our plan for this important anniversary is to go home to talk with our governments about what we are learning in these two cities, to ask why they are still prepared 70 years later to destroy hundreds of cities in similar fashion, and to urge them to join the Humanitarian Pledge.

Working across national, religious and societal boundaries also adds strength in another way. Many of our member churches have little access to their governments. However, joining with other faiths, or with responsible, representative civil society organizations (like the parliamentarians we will hear from in this session), they can gain the recognition needed to do advocacy. Our actions are generally more effective voices when we take them with others. We are grateful to Buddhist sisters and brothers for this kind of collaboration here in Japan.

SERVE THE COMMON GOOD

To live the courage of our convictions, to unite in focused action with others, it is essential that we serve the common good.

Early in this new millennium, a philosopher named Parker Palmer observed that we are fortunate to live at a time when self-interest converges with altruism. To solve global problems, the actions of nations, groups and even individuals must also serve the common good. Working for the advantage of everyone is therefore not only right, it is necessary.

The imperative of our era is to act on the fact that our own fate is linked to the fate of others. The humanitarian initiative against nuclear weapons highlights that challenge. So does the debate about curbing climate change. In both of these cases, an unsolved global problem is putting the world at risk, and the fate of the global majority is not adequately addressed. Instead of acting as if both problems are insoluble, the international community could treat nuclear disarmament as training for the rather more complex, widespread and long-term challenges associated with climate change.

The point of encouraging our government to join the Humanitarian Pledge is to create a platform that consolidates and empowers the global majority in favour of abolishing nuclear weapons. Banning nuclear arms is a critical step, but when they are banned they will not disappear. The majority will have to take

other steps together. A law against the weapon that destroyed this city 70 years ago is shockingly overdue. When that is done, majority action will then be needed to block the use of nuclear weapons, to end the possession of nuclear weapons, and to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The road to a just and sustainable peace is long. Yet surely the gift of faith will sustain us along the way. The rule of law is important, but it is subsumed in much of our lives by what some call the Golden Rule. Practicing goodwill and even love toward those who threaten us, taking care for the welfare of those whom we fear, is not only a sign of spiritual maturity but also of worldly wisdom. What has always been enlightened self-interest is that even more now in an interdependent world. With nuclear weapons, as with climate change, the world is coming to realize that, in the end, unless all of life is protected, no lives are truly safe.

What is required of us now for nuclear disarmament? Make sure each of our governments has endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge. Urge them to support a majority-led ban on nuclear weapons. If your government does not agree, help them to at least understand the majority's purpose and motivation. The path to human security and peace is one that all must share. Let us so live the courage of our convictions, unite with others in focused action and together serve the common good.

NOTES – not for delivery

¹ Member church and related ecumenical and inter-religious conference statements raising nuclear issues in the lead-up to, and after, the WCC Assembly in Busan:

- *Declaration of the International Conference on the East Japan Disaster, "Resisting the Myth of Safe Nuclear Energy: The Fundamental Question from Fukushima"*, United Church of Christ in Japan, Sendai, March 2014.
- *A Call for Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula: Ecumenical Korea Peace Statement*, United Methodist Church et al, Atlanta, May 2013
- *A Joint Statement on Peace in the Korean Peninsula*, Presbyterian Church in Korea-Presbyterian Church USA, Louisville, April 2013
- *Sang-Saeng: Living Together in Justice and Peace*, Pre-Assembly Nuclear Advocacy Consultation Working Paper, WCC-ecumenical-interfaith, Seoul, December 2012
- *No to Nuclear Power! Faith Declaration from Fukushima*, National Council of Churches in Japan, Fukushima, December 2012
- *Christians for a Nuclear-free Earth*, ecumenical statement, Tokyo, May 2012
- *Faith Declaration for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy*, Korean Network for a World Free of Nuclear Power and Weapons, Seoul, March 2012
- *For a World without Nuclear Power Plants*, Anglican Church in Japan, Kyoto, May 2012
- Asia Inter-Religious Conferences on Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution, three conference statements: Okinawa, 2012; Seoul, 2010; Tokyo, 2008
- *For a World of Peace, a World Free of Nuclear Weapons*, ecumenical Korean-international statement, 2010

² *Self-assured destruction: The climate impacts of nuclear war*, Alan Robock and Owen Brian, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2012, <http://climate.envsci.rutgers.edu/pdf/RobockToonSAD.pdf>

³ *Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons*, 68th Session, UN General Assembly, 2013, http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com13/statements/21Oct_Joint.pdf