

Cities in the Nuclear Age

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Of all the many 40th anniversaries observed in 1985, including the end of World War II and the founding of the United Nations, surely none matter more than August the 6th and August the 9th. The citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the door-keepers of the nuclear age. They have dedicated themselves to insuring that that door, twice opened, shall remain forevermore and firmly shut.

I don't believe that anyone could bring himself, or herself, to blame the people of these cities if they expressed a desire to bury their painful memories, to enjoy a hard-won affluence and the simpler joys of civic life-- such as the triumphs of a great baseball team like the Hiroshima Carp. Keeping alive the memory of August 1945 is a heavy burden for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But there are represented here today nearly 100 cities that will not allow Hiroshima and Nagasaki to carry that burden alone. Some of them are sister-cities to our hosts, and some, like Volgograd and Dresden, have also known near-total devastation in war.

This World Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-City Solidarity is remarkable for the coming together of three factors: A unique setting, in the only two cities to have experienced the atomic bomb; the participation of local, municipal governments from around the world; and a particular placement in time, 40 years after the dreadful initiation of the nuclear age and on the threshold of a new period of nuclear danger.

First, the setting: The atomic bomb that in a flash reduced this city to rubble at 8:16 in the morning, 40 years ago tomorrow, transformed Hiroshima into not merely a place but a symbol with everlasting, universal significance. The first atomic bomb unleashed by man against man was, tragically, not the last; Nagasaki suffered the same fate three days later. The citizens of both cities rebuilt their communities and their lives with great difficulty, and with little external aid in the early years since their nation, exhausted and battered by war, had little help to offer.

Seeing these two thriving cities today, it is difficult to imagine the devastation in which they lay 40 years ago. It is this very difficulty-- the difficulty of remembrance-- that Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as cities, have set

themselves to combat. Today, they stand, irrevocably, for the appalling human consequences of nuclear war. And they have set for themselves the task of assuring that the rest of the human community shall never forget what happened here on August 6th and 9th, 1945; shall have brought home in vivid, searing images the cost in human flesh and blood-- in human accomplishment and spirit-- of modern warfare. The hibakusha, and even those citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki born after the blast, are the primary custodians of a vitally important part of humanity's collective memory.

So much of contemporary debate about nuclear weapons is conducted in abstractions: numbers of warheads, throw-weights, configurations of strategic triads, and the dreadful geometry of deterrence with its premise of mutual assured destruction.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki of all places on earth can tell us what mutual assured destruction really means: the multiplication of horror beyond our minds' ability to comprehend-- until we come here. The rationality of nuclear strategic doctrine is reduced to absurdity by the reality of the Hiroshima of August 6th, 1945, and the Nagasaki of August 9th. The nuclear strategists and their political masters urge peace-loving people to be "realistic" about the need for nuclear arms, to concede the logic of a game-theory whose antidote for murder is suicide. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in contrast, urge all people to confront the human reality of atomic war, firm in the conviction that the reality of their experience may drive out the spurious rationality of the war-gamers.

The people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki enter the debate over nuclear weaponry not as strategists, not as theoreticians, not even as politicians in the usual sense, but as representatives of human communities that have-- these two alone-- actually experienced the horror of nuclear attack. They present the human face-- the terribly wounded and traumatized human face-- of nuclear war. And they have invited other cities, from many different countries, to join them in working for the total abolition of nuclear weapons, so that their tragedy will not be visited on other human beings in other cities.

Some of these cities have declared themselves to be, like Japan, nuclear-free zones. Such a declaration constitutes a direct refusal by citizens to participate in the folly of nuclear armament. This refusal is an important symbol, and potentially an important tool in the struggle to halt and reverse the arms race. One of the most disturbing aspects of the nuclear age is the overwhelming sense of powerlessness that people feel in confrontation with these awesome weapons and a global military-industrial complex seemingly immune to the reality of human agony. To declare one's own community a nuclear-free zone manifests a deep and basic human desire for freedom from dread; a desire to play neither the role of victim nor that of victimizer. But it is surely illusory to suppose that any city-- or even any country-- can unilaterally opt out of the nuclear danger. We all exist under the nuclear umbrella or the nuclear shadow-- usually both at once-- of the global balance of terror. We are all tied to social and economic and political

systems that support-- or at least tacitly accept-- the nuclear stalemate that holds all of human civilization hostage.

But there are important signs of resistance and refusal-- of which this gathering is one. It must be recognized, however, that the struggle to dispel the nuclear shadow will be a long and arduous one. Declaration and demonstration of our intent to do so is not enough: It is only the beginning of the struggle. The friends of peace must develop the political and scientific and technical expertise to challenge with authority the nuclear strategists-- but the friends of peace must also retain their sure attachment to the human meaning of the nuclear threat, their insistence on the primacy of life and freedom.

Four-and-a-half years ago, the city of Hiroshima and the United Nations University joined together in inviting Pope John Paul II to speak from this same platform. I would like to recall to you some of his words on that occasion. He said, "In the past, it was possible to destroy a village, a town, a region, even a country. Now, it is the whole planet that has come under threat. This fact should finally compel everyone to face a basic moral consideration: from now on, it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive. The moral and political choice that faces us is that of putting all the resources of mind, science, and culture at the service of peace and of the building up of a new society, a society that will succeed in eliminating the causes of fratricidal wars by generously pursuing the total progress of each individual and of all humanity.... We must say to the people of today: Do not doubt, your future is in your own hands. The building of a more just humanity or a more united international community is not just a dream or a vain ideal. It is a moral imperative, a sacred duty, one that the intellectual and spiritual genius of man can face, through a fresh mobilization of everybody's talents and energies, through putting to work all the technical and cultural resources of man."

It is local authorities, with their close links to their constituencies, who have the greatest possibility for stimulating direct action in promoting peace and international understanding. They have also the greatest opportunity to respond to and activate the desires of their communities to work for nuclear disarmament. With the opportunities also come responsibilities. I feel that one of the most importance of these is an educational responsibility: to insure that citizens have access to realistic information about the human consequences of nuclear war, to build the political and civic constituencies for peaceful and constructive uses of our scientific and technical capacities, to foster the spirit of international cooperation and the instinct for survival of not just ourselves and our neighbors, but the whole human family.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the best possible places to begin this effort of education, for no one who comes here can go away unmoved and unsobered by the exposure to their ordeals. Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced first-hand what they hope-- and work to assure-- will never happen to another city: the total, though in this case temporary, breakdown of a community,

the destruction of all municipal facilities and services, the long legacy of illness and fear. At this conference, the two cities share their experiences with representatives of 64 cities from twenty-three countries, as well as with 33 Japanese cities.

I find it particularly encouraging that there are a number of cities of the Third World represented here. The menace of nuclear weapons cannot be adequately addressed as an issue solely of East-West confrontation. Yet there has been a tendency to do so, both in the North and the South. Let us look more closely at the irrationality of confining the nuclear issue to the East-West dimension. In order to do so we must touch upon three salient issues: the condition of instability in the Third World, nuclear proliferation, and the environmental impact of large-scale nuclear war as encapsulated in the "nuclear winter" theory.

Since the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, more than 150 wars have taken place in the world. The vast majority of them have taken place in the Third World. The pace and scale of social change, the devastating impact of economic recession, the festering of old grievances and the upsurge of new demands have strained the social and political resilience of Third World societies to the breaking point. On top of this, the Third World has become an arena for the acting out of East-West competition, precisely because the achievement of nuclear parity has made it too dangerous for the super-powers to fight each other directly. The outcome of conflicts in the Third World has considerable impact on the strategic balance in the world as a whole. It is worth noting that in most of the instances in which the use of nuclear weapons has been seriously contemplated since August, 1945, Third World countries have been involved.

The patterns of armed conflict in the Third World are unpredictable, and the long-term political stability of many developing countries and regions is doubtful. In such an unsettled context, the prospect of nuclear proliferation is terrifying. Yet it is very likely that insecurities arising from new or existing tensions will lead some countries toward an all-out effort to acquire nuclear weapons. The most powerful incentive for any nation to do so is the assumption that its opponents are planning to do the same, or have actually embarked upon the process. This vicious spiral is already underway, between India and Pakistan, Brazil and Argentina, South Africa and the front line states, Israel and Iraq. Many other states have the technical capability to develop nuclear weapons in a relatively short time.

Even more terrifying than the spread of nuclear weapons to potentially unstable or irresponsible nations is the prospect of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of non-governmental groups, especially those who have already shown their willingness to use terrorist tactics, and to sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians in the attempt to further a political aim. You may remember that, a few years ago, an undergraduate student at Princeton University in the United States published a credible blueprint for an atomic weapon. The increased sophistication, portability and power of nuclear devices, the transparency of the basics of their design, and the increasing circulation of

fissile materials breaks down any confidence that the nuclear monopoly can be retained for very long. If an undergraduate student can design a textbook bomb, the nuclear suitcase bomb cannot be far behind. Already government arsenals contain "backpack" bombs-- tempting targets for theft if not imitation.

The growth of the nuclear power industry raises the risk of proliferation in two ways. The diversion of weapons-grade uranium from conventional reactors has been constrained in large part by suppliers' and manufacturers' safeguards. However, the current economic crisis in the nuclear power industry has turned the reactor business into a buyers' market. There is a danger of a consequent bidding-down of safeguards by countries that are in a position to buy reactors. Secondly, the development of the breeder reactor, even if it operates only in the industrial countries, is beginning to put such quantities of plutonium into circulation that preventing the diversion of the small amount needed to construct a small weapon begins to seem a Herculean task.

If it is foolish for the North to ignore the conditions and capabilities of the South in calculating ways to keep the nuclear genie bottled up, it is equally foolish for the Third World to look upon the nuclear threat as something of concern only to the nuclear-weapons states and their neighbors and close allies, irrelevant to the pressing problems of hunger and poverty. This complacency has been shattered by the elaboration of the "nuclear winter" theory, whose plausibility is now almost universally acknowledged though its potential severity and duration are still controversial. The prospect of a global nuclear winter following a sizeable exchange of weapons in the northern hemisphere makes clear that all countries are imperiled by atomic weapons, whether or not they possess or plan to acquire such weapons. As I said before, there can be no opting out of the danger. The Third World has a direct and urgent stake in progress on nuclear arms control, and in the re-establishment of an atmosphere of detente between the superpowers that will permit such progress.

The universality of the nuclear threat makes it imperative that the peace movement achieves a similar universality. There is particular urgency that it make itself felt in the threshold nuclear states. The problems of nuclear proliferation, the arms race, and hair-trigger readiness for nuclear war are too vital to be consigned to governments alone. Moreover, it is important to remember that the major revolutions in consciousness that have come about in the past two decades are the products, not of national policies for the most part, but of peoples' movements. I am thinking of the environmental protection movement, the women's movement, the labor movement, various civil rights movements, and so forth. In these areas, governments have been followers more often than leaders. Peace activists should not remain isolated from other people's movements, but should join with them in coalitions for the pursuit of common goals. When the people demand to be heard and insist upon defining problems and pushing for their solutions, governments often do, in time, respond-- even governments that are not democratic in form.

It is not enough, however, for the people to demand peace. A deeper level of analysis is required, in order to understand the forces that obstruct peace. The United Nations University is one institution that is seeking, through research on the theme of peace and security, to gain a better understanding of how to move toward a positive peace, which represents a genuine resolution of conflicts rather than a reliance on military force.

Pope John Paul II spoke in Hiroshima of the need to build a society that will eliminate the causes of war by pursuing progress for all of humanity. Peace without the resolution of injustice is a sterile, and a fragile, peace. So those of us in cities and communities around the world who hope to push aside the nuclear shadow, along with the lesser but still terrible shadow of conventional war, cannot just cry for peace; we must also work for peace--and that means working for justice, the transformation of our societies step-by-step, and the transformation of our relationships with the people of other societies.

I have dwelt upon the meaning of the setting in which this conference is taking place, and on the significance of the representation of other cities here. Now I would like, briefly, to say a word about the historical moment at which we gather. We are 40 years into the nuclear age, and we live with a vivid and growing sense of peril. Yet I think we can draw some hope from the fact that in these forty years nuclear weapons have not been used in war. Nuclear weapons technology has become increasingly accessible. The nuclear power industry has grown; as a result the arcs of the nuclear fuel cycle have lengthened. Political tensions certainly have not subsided. Yet there has been a rather surprising restraint in proliferation thus far. This is no grounds for complacency, but it may perhaps indicate that humankind has some collective instinct to avoid the fate of the dinosaurs.

I put this forward more as a hope than a conviction. The cities where our people live and work, love and play, would be the first casualties in a nuclear war. So they must be the first line of defense against the occurrence of such a war. Local government in the service of its citizens' needs has a responsibility to address itself to the international and national as well as local issues that affect citizens' welfare and security. Of these, none is more urgent than nuclear disarmament.