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CITIES ARE NOT TARGETS

I am honored speak on such a special occasion, to such a special crowd, and humbled to do so in such a special place. Here, the name of my presentation, “Cities are not targets” takes a special meaning, as in the basement of St. Nikolai’s Memorial Church one cannot help but marvel at the grandeur of human enterprise, while at the same time be appalled by the reaches of human destruction.

“Cities are not targets”, the title of my presentation, is also the name of a campaign launched in 2006 by Mayors for Peace, an organization founded in 1982 by the mayor of Hiroshima with the aim of producing nuclear abolition, an organization that currently has over 8,200 member cities.

Now, when we talk about cities, urban centers of civilian population being targets, we are not talking about peace, we are talking about war, and the bare minimum of humanity that must be followed during war. We are talking about the rules of war, for civilians -innocent noncombatants- must not be a part of war.

During World War II, attacks on civilian structures were justified by “othering”, that is, by objectifying populations, making, not the government or the army the enemy, but the people. In popular culture nowadays we see how nuclear weapons are used to fight off evil aliens in scientific action movies. Entire races of evil, ugly aliens who want to destroy humanity are killed off and humanity is saved by the atomic bomb. In the 1940’s, the aliens, in the public eye of many people in the United States, were the Japanese. The Japanese people themselves, who looked and acted so differently, were somehow evil. In the collective mind of many in the United States, all Japanese people were accomplices to their army’s misdeeds. Hence, they deserved the atomic bomb. They had it coming.

Nuclear weapons are inherently racist and xenophobic: they were created and used with the idea of killing off a population of people who are “not like us”. This “othering”, this extreme indifference towards the horrible suffering of those who are somehow different is the reason for being of these weapons and why they are the epitome of cruelty. In this sense, the words of our dear and renowned Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow resonate loudly: “nuclear weapons are not a necessary evil, but the ultimate evil”.

Now, since World War II, International law has evolved. International Humanitarian Law, the law of war, condemns any attack on civilians and thus condemns the use of explosive weapons in urban centers, as it is disproportionate and indiscriminate and harms civilians directly. Weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, landmines, and cluster munitions, contravene International Humanitarian Law because they do not distinguish between military and civilian targets and attack everything and everyone indiscriminately. Explosive weapons in cities not only kill and harm innocent people directly -who may require long-term assistance-, they also cause other problems. They cause

displacement, the damage and destruction of housing, schools, hospitals, water and sanitation systems, and this worsens the suffering of innocent people in a conflict.

With nuclear weapons, by far the most destructive of all weapons, and the ones that cause the most suffering, civilians are the targets. Cities are the targets. They go beyond affecting the housing, schools, communication and healthcare infrastructure, or the water and sanitation systems. They destroy and contaminate. The city becomes uninhabitable. The food systems of the city -any farming on which the population depends- become unusable. The city's historical and environmental patrimony are destroyed beyond repair.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Over 200,000 people died in the first few days and many more have suffered and died insidiously over the years. Many of the injured suffered horribly from the blast and the heat, and more so by the effects of radiation, something most people were unaware of at the time. The mysterious disease that people knew nothing about caused many to die and suffer atrociously: their abdomens exploded, their faces melted, they bled to death. Their wounds would not heal. And those apparently healthy would get sick and die years later. Most of the people who suffered these horrors were noncombatant people: elderly people, women and children. Children. And these people suffered further the stigmatization by other people in Japan. The children were kept apart from other children, for fear of contagion. They would have difficulty finding work, as they were perceived as sickly, or finding partners, as it was feared that they would bear defective children. Therefore, many learned to keep their origins to themselves and lie about where they were from. What was once a source of pride, their city, had become a source of scorn and shame.

Let us also consider the permanent losses. Each person, each victim, their personal history, their aspirations, was reduced to a number. Entire families and their history were wiped out. But if we talk about destroying a city, we're also talking about destroying the natural and historical patrimony of a community, of a human settlement that has evolved over hundreds or thousands of years, so the harm - to humanity in general- is incalculable.

This is why, when dealing with nuclear weapons, it is crucial to change the narrative, from one of strategy, to one of humanity. It is important to counter the abstract concepts of "security and stability" with facts about their effects, to raise awareness of their actual consequences and the immense risk they represent. Therefore, it makes absolute sense to tackle the nuclear issue from the standpoint of cities. Because the municipalities are aware of their responsibility to care for their citizens, to help manage their health and their education, and they have a direct relationship with them. They understand their obligation to protect their citizens, and to protect their history and their city's treasures and assets.

Cities are the main spaces for meeting and exchange in our societies and for interacting with people, groups, companies, ideas and values. Hence, in 2018, in the context of the *II World Forum on urban violence and education for coexistence and peace*, in Madrid, ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons launched the ICAN Cities Appeal. This is a grassroots campaign to raise awareness and build local civil and political support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). It aims to expand solidarity among local governments that support the TPNW, while also enabling individual citizens to become proactively engaged by reaching out to their local officials.

National awareness is needed to advance the norm embodied by the TPNW, especially in nuclear weapon states and countries in military alliances with them. Since it was launched, the ICAN Cities

Appeal has become a very successful campaign that has incorporated hundreds of cities. This includes cities such as Oslo, Helsinki, Paris, Barcelona, Zurich, Gothenburg, Manchester, Toronto and New York. In Germany, thanks to the tireless work of campaigners engaging in political advocacy, this campaign has been quite successful, with a list of nearly 140 cities that includes Berlin, Munich and Hamburg, in support of the TPNW. These cities' officials have understood the nuclear issue, that by supporting the TPNW they are fulfilling their crucial role of protecting their constituents, and that this support can provide a significant and direct contribution to the success of the TPNW.

Cities undertake the world's most urgent issues. Just like with nuclear weapons, the other existential threat, climate change, is forecasted to impact cities the hardest. This has motivated many cities to take action and establish coalitions to help deliver the goals of the Paris Agreement. The same is true for the ICAN Cities Appeal, whereby cities can take several initiatives that stand up against the nuclear hegemony, promote nuclear disarmament and make sure that public funds are not invested in nuclear weapons. They can, effectively, apply the TPNW to their own governance. Moreover, an international coalition of cities and civil society can be instrumental in breaking the unacceptable status quo in nuclear weapons policy.

The TPNW is a triumph of international diplomacy and a milestone in multilateralism, and through its stigmatizing normative effect -changing the discourse on nuclear weapons-, it offers the best hope of finally moving the world towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. Stigmatization through prohibition is an approach that has worked many times in history, particularly with the other weapons of mass destruction. Currently, no state boasts of being a chemical weapons power, or of having biological weapons in their security doctrines. This is because there is a strong, widespread condemnation and an international norm that makes such claims taboo. And this is the path that we are currently undertaking with nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament is more urgent than it has ever been. A world without nuclear weapons is necessary and, more importantly, it is possible. Let us work together to make it possible. Together we can get rid of the nuclear threat and make peace prevail.

Thank you.
