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Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations¹

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Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations

Nuclear weapons and human security

Submitted by Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

Overview

1. People everywhere seek security. This very natural and legitimate desire does not, however, require or justify the possession of nuclear weapons; nuclear weapons do not meet the real security needs of people or States. The growing demand for the legal prohibition of nuclear weapons arises as part of a shared global quest for authentic security—for human security for all. As a Buddhist faith-based organization committed to grassroots public education for nuclear weapons abolition, the SGI wishes to submit the following statement in order to contribute to the deliberations of the upcoming session of the Open-ended Working Group to be held in May.

The bankrupt logic of nuclear deterrence

2. It has become increasingly evident that the logic of nuclear weapons fails on its own terms. Despite assertions to the contrary, they are not an effective guarantee of national, much less human, security. This reality is placed in stark relief by the chilling specter of nuclear terrorism.

3. The destruction wrought by nuclear weapons is so indiscriminate, uncontainable and enduring that a tacit consensus has emerged that they are in fact unusable and of no real military utility. Deterrence, based on the implicit threat of actual use, is now in fact their only role. But even this “non-use use,” by compelling the world’s peoples to live under the constant threat of apocalyptic destruction, has intolerable humanitarian impacts. It is

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impossible to see how this is compatible with the security interests of States and their citizens.

Undermining human security

4. In a world of growing needs and finite resources, the opportunity costs of nuclear weapons have become increasingly unbearable.

5. If the immense resources now spent on nuclear weapons were to be applied to the fields of hygiene, health and education, the lives of vast numbers of people could be improved. The continued maintenance and modernization of nuclear weapons runs counter to the spirit of Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for the “least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.”

6. Nuclear weapons also subvert the nonmaterial basis for human security, such vital yet intangible public goods as human dignity and hope. The proliferation of despair, nihilism and senseless violence in the decades since the first use of nuclear weapons has roots in their toxic impact on the human spirit.

7. By threatening to obliterate the accumulated achievements of human society, erasing the individual and collective record of our lives, nuclear weapons undermine our existence as historical, cultural beings—the very heart of our humanity. They erode the meaning of human life and impede our ability to look to the future with hope.

A misplaced pursuit of prestige

8. What can justify the continued possession of nuclear weapons at the cost of these grave risks and burdens? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a mistaken quest for national prestige is a core motivation here.

9. The discourse of national prestige must be transformed such that the possession and use of nuclear weapons—including their use in the implicit threat of deterrence—is thoroughly stigmatized within the international community. A global norm must be established that nuclear weapons are, in simplest terms, nothing to be proud of.

10. The prestige equation must be shifted so that the courage and vision of countries that have chosen non-nuclear paths to security are recognized and lauded. Similarly, States that move to recalibrate their security stance away from reliance on nuclear weapons should be recognized as making not only a wise decision for their own interest but also as contributing to the security of all States, the cause of human security for all.

A call for empathy

11. At the heart of the nuclear weapons issue is the radical negation of others—of their humanity and their equal right to happiness and life.

12. As Buddhists upholding the value and dignity of life, we believe that this can only be countered through a sustained effort to expand our individual and shared capacities for imaginative empathy. In the Buddha’s teachings we find these words: “All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.”

13. There is a universal impulse to avoid suffering and harm. We all have an intuitive sense of the unique value of our individual being. To the degree that we can realize that others must feel the same way, we can sense the reality of their suffering and embrace their

dignity. Such empathy makes genuine dialogue possible. And dialogue is the most certain path to realizing our shared quest for the authentic experience of security.

A truly global enterprise

14. The challenge of nuclear disarmament is not something that concerns only the nuclear-weapon States; it must be a truly global enterprise involving all States and fully engaging civil society. All States have an obligation to promote and participate in good faith negotiations for disarmament, bringing them to a successful conclusion.

15. Therefore, we urge the Open-ended Working Group to take the following actions as it pursues its vitally important mandate:

(a) To stress in its report to the United Nations General Assembly that nuclear weapons present an unacceptable threat to all people and States;

(b) To continue to encourage all States to participate actively in the Open-ended Working Group and subsequent processes in order to fulfil their obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament;

(c) To outline in its report, with the maximum degree of detail, a legal framework that will facilitate the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons under strict international control;

(d) To outline in its report a roadmap for the transition away from nuclear deterrence (including extended deterrence) regimes toward an inclusive global security system that does not rely on nuclear weapons and advances the larger objective of demilitarizing international relations.
