



“To Safeguard Future Generations - Interfaith Responses to the Threat of Nuclear Weapons”

UN General Assembly First Committee, October 2018

Below is the full text of the presentation delivered by Hayley Ramsay-Jones on behalf of Soka Gakkai International, at the First Committee side event held on 16 October 2018.

Good morning everyone. It is a real pleasure to be here with you all today. Before I begin I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers for inviting me to speak on this panel.

It is always difficult to speak last on a panel, as much of what I wanted to say has already been said; however, I think there are some things that are worthy of saying more than once, and there are a couple of different perspectives that I would also like to share.

Similarly to others here listening to Ira’s presentation about the horrific humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, I am shocked and disturbed. It is very sobering and can often feel as though we are all living in an overwhelming state of affairs.

As Ira pointed out, the very idea that it is “luck”, not our human wisdom that has kept us from nuclear abyss, and that “luck” like it always does, runs out. The very idea that as long as nuclear weapons exist, it is not a question of “if” but “when” there will be another nuclear fallout; and that this action could result in the extinction or the near extinction of our species - is truly terrifying and insane.

But how do we, in all of our wonderful diversity as a human race face up to this? This is a question that we at the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay Buddhist organization often ponder.

Firstly, we believe that religious organizations and communities have a duty to protect the sanctity of life and protect the environment that sustains us, the mere existence of nuclear weapons is a constant

threat to this.

It is crucial therefore that religious organizations are actively involved in the work of nuclear disarmament at all levels, and that we reach out to our own congregations, parishes, and membership, as well as to other faith-groups and other actors to come together to get rid of these weapons of mass murder and destruction.

We also believe that peace and disarmament education (PDE) is key if we want to achieve nuclear abolition. In this regard, we were delighted to see that the importance of PDE was reflected in the UN Secretary General’s Disarmament Agenda. Taking an intersectional approach, highlighting the moral and ethical perspectives, promoting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – including undergoing advocacy work as an ICAN Partner to ensure the Treaty’s early entry into force, are all important aspects that we believe are crucial for a religious organization to engage in.

During the negotiations for the TPNW, we worked hard for the inclusion of a number of different aspects to feature in the Treaty text, such as voices of survivors, women, youth, religious leaders, and PDE. Though we would have liked the text to have been stronger in parts, we were pleased to see that all of these aspects were in fact featured in the final draft.

Regarding the role of PDE, similarly to the Secretary General’s Disarmament Agenda, we see its value as enabling individuals to:

- Develop critical thinking skills;
- Understand the multiple factors at the local, national and global levels that foster or undermine peace and disarmament efforts; and
- Encourage attitudes and actions that promote peace and disarmament.



We believe that PDE has the potential to transform the way people think about peace so that it is felt as an immediate and personal reality. According to UNESCO “...disarmament education should be related to the lives and concerns of the learners...” (UNESCO, 1980)

In 1957, Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai made an impassioned appeal against nuclear weapons, He stated: “Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons” (Toda, 1957).

Within this statement, that was delivered to 50,000 young people, Toda was expressing his desire to get to the root of the problem which he identified as humanity’s bleak tendencies to dehumanize and objectify the “other”. This approach implies that nuclear weapons, rather than being far removed from our day-to-day reality, are deeply and intimately connected to our very being.

In another quote from SGI, President Daisaku Ikeda stated, “If we are to put the era of nuclear terror behind us, we must struggle against the real ‘enemy.’ That enemy is not nuclear weapons per se, nor is it the states that possess or develop them. The real enemy that we must confront is the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons; the readiness to annihilate others when they are seen as a threat or as a hindrance to the realization of our objectives” (Ikeda, 2009).

Again, this quote highlights that part of ourselves at times wishes to eliminate others whom we deem as a threat. This unchallenged desire in its most manifested state is what has given rise to nuclear weapons and it is also what sustains them.

In terms of intersectionality, we see that PDE has a role in making clearer the links between nuclear weapons, war, and other forms of violence and social injustices, including structural violence and

inequalities, oppression and the misuse of power. Taking an intersectional approach means that we should address the lack of diversity in decision-making about disarmament issues, it means examining the race, class and gendered dimensions of weaponry systems, as well as incorporating other inclusionary analysis.

Taking an intersectional approach means that when we say “no” to all men panels, we are also saying “no” to all white, and all western ones. This inclusionary approach to disarmament processes is vital, if we are serious about getting rid of nuclear weapons and the inhumane oppression that they represent then all of our voices need to be heard.

Regarding the ethical and moral perspectives, religious and faith-based organizations have been active in pushing this agenda, they have been doing so independently but also coming together as a collective interfaith effort. I believe religious groups are well placed to lead on such perspectives, but when we do so, we must also recognize that often there is much work to be done in our own faith communities. Religious and Faith-based organizations, as well as broader segments of civil society and governments, have the tendency to replicate the same structural hierarchies, that reinforce patriarchal and colonial exclusionist practices.

In our joint efforts for peace and disarmament, we should all be reflective about this, to be honest, and courageous to dare to look at our own teachings, policies, and practices to see where we are truly upholding the dignity of life, and where we uphold inequalities and injustices. It is this change, this inner transformation on an individual, group, a religious, cultural and organizational level that will enable us to go beyond the ban – to finally reach nuclear zero and to sustain it.

In this regard, I strongly believe that although the struggle for nuclear abolition is difficult, it is that way because ultimately, it is an expression of our commitment too, and our belief in, our shared humanity.