

No right hands for wrong weapons

Simon Coveney

Exactly 75 years ago, at 8.15am, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. The bomb exploded 2,000 feet above Hiroshima destroying five square miles of the city. The bomb killed an estimated 140,000 people. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, which is estimated to have killed over 74,000. More than a generation later many still suffer from the effects of radiation, with women and girls disproportionately affected. August 6th, 1945, marked the dawn of the atomic age and one of the darkest days in human history.

Today we commemorate all those who died. We pay tribute to the dignity, courage and resilience of those who survived, known in Japanese as the *hibakusha*. They describe what they endured as a living hell. We recall other victims and survivors who continue to suffer the enduring aftermaths of thousands of nuclear tests that occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

Many of these survivors have spent decades telling their stories and campaigning against nuclear weapons. They include women such as Setsuko Thurlow, who experienced the horrors of the Hiroshima bombing as a 13-year-old schoolgirl; Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, poet and environmental activist who writes about the legacy of nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and communities surrounding the former Soviet Semipalatinsk Test Site in Kazakhstan.

On this Hiroshima Day, I am proud that Ireland today ratifies the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This treaty, negotiated in 2017, sets a global norm prohibiting all nuclear weapons. It

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honours the memory of the victims of nuclear weapons and the key role played by survivors in providing living testimony and calling on us as successor generations to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Ireland's ratification of the treaty reflects our deep concern about the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear explosion and the sheer impossibility of any adequate humanitarian response. This has led us, as a country, to our deep-rooted conviction that we must ensure nuclear weapons can never be used again under any circumstance. Nuclear disarmament has long been a feature of Irish foreign policy. Ireland is closely associated with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which remains the cornerstone for nuclear issues and which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

The new recent treaty builds on the framework of earlier treaty. It is the outcome of a two-year process led by states and civil society concerned at the increasing risks and catastrophic consequences of a nuclear explosion, as well as by lack of progress by the nuclear states on the disarmament provisions of the older treaty. Ireland, along with Austria, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa, took a leading role in the process that led to the adoption of the new treaty. In recognition of its historic contribution to global peace and security, the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

Although nuclear weapons stockpiles have significantly reduced since the heights they reached during the Cold War, it is no exaggeration to say



“ Knowing what we know about the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear explosion and the sheer impossibility of any adequate humanitarian response, we must reject the very notion that they can ever be used again under any circumstance.

Ireland will continue to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons whose very existence threatens us all.”

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that nuclear weapons continue to threaten the future of life on this planet. Increasing geopolitical rivalry between nuclear-armed states raises the risk of nuclear weapons use, whether by accident, miscalculation or intentionally, to unacceptable levels. The proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and know-how is a grave threat.

Ireland will continue to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons and to ensure the most powerful and most indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction ever invented have no place in the security doctrine of any state. The very existence of nuclear weapons threatens us all. There can be no right hands for the wrong weapons. The only guarantee of protection from nuclear weapons use is their complete elimination.

Despite public health restrictions, Hiroshima Day will be marked, often virtually, in Japan and in locations around the world. An annual ceremony will be held in Merrion Square, Dublin, to commemorate the victims. And I am proud that this year, at the UN in New York, Ireland will deposit its instrument of ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, marking our contribution to a world free of nuclear weapons.

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‘... All kinds of problems, of course, arise as to control verification and inspection; but it is difficult often to escape the impression that many of these issues are raised only to find difficulties and to block or delay agreements. Why not begin simply by outlawing the USE, MANUFACTURE, SALE, TRANSFER and STOCKPILING of nuclear weapons or components thereof? Why not *now* stop completely the production of all nuclear weapons?’

Seán MacBride

Nobel Lecture, 1974