

Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic and Disarmament

- From “Crisis” to “Opportunity”, from “Conflict” to “Cooperation” -

Members of Japan Association of Disarmament Studies

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The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is threatening the world. As of April 27, 2020, more than 200, 000 deaths are recorded due to the virus. We send our deepest condolences and pray for the early confinement of COVID-19 through united global efforts.

This pandemic has already affected global economy, politics and all aspects of our lives. Disarmament is no exception. We, as an association working towards disarmament, raise three important points related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, almost all international conferences or meetings have been postponed or cancelled, and thus important diplomatic opportunities have been lost/stalled. Among the most significant is the Treaty on Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference scheduled for this year, which is now postponed until early 2021 at the latest. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the NPT and the 75th anniversary of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings. Thus we lost a precious opportunity for achieving important results. However, this may be considered an opportunity for regaining efforts towards nuclear disarmament. Our association will do our best to conduct research to make this opportunity fruitful for future disarmament.

Second, the importance of “international cooperation” has become clearer. No nation or peoples is immune to viruses. Shutting down cities and national borders may be effective for the protection of people to a certain extent, but unless the global community works together, the global fight against the pandemic will be futile. Unfortunately, we are seeing move in the opposite direction among big powers, and some have taken actions to undermine efforts of/by international organizations. Besides, behaviors to conceal or manipulate information could expose the international community to greater risks.

On March 24, 2020, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a “global cease fire”. Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation are all part of the process of achieving peace that can only be realized through international cooperation and commitment. And the fruit of such efforts should/will be shared among all members of the global community. Our association believes it is time for us to overcome all “conflicts” and put the highest priority on international cooperation to solve global issues.

Third, we note the possibility that it would pose us a change in thinking about “security”. Though pandemics have traditionally/long been considered a “non-traditional, non-military” security issue, they have not been seen as a challenge to the very survival of states

or a driver of change to the international order.

But if the current international order based on the states' military power were to change owing to this pandemic, we would need a new and more detailed discussion on the relationship between "the role of military power" and "security". Furthermore, fighting against pandemics by closing down national borders may affect the current international framework on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. For example, the role and significance of Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) could be reevaluated as the threat of pandemics increases. Moreover, we may have to think carefully about the way on-site inspections systems work, such as Safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the inspections under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Our association believes that, in addition to the importance of international cooperation, we need to tackle such new issues associated with disarmament/arms control and non-proliferation.

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