See, also <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Online-World-Conference-HR-Remarks.pdf>

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First of all, thank you so much for this invitation. It’s really really encouraging and it means a lot to us that you are able to organize such a large meeting through this online measure. And it is really a great pleasure for me to attend this event.

And to hear this report on how many signatures have been collected to the petition for nuclear disarmament, every time I receive the petitions, I get a sort of, a source of energy. It keeps me going in this important and yet difficult line of work, the elimination of nuclear weapons.

And I’m really sorry, I regret that the present circumstances of COVID-19 do not allow me to receive the petition in person; it does not allow me to meet you in person in New York. But I definitely do very much look forward to doing so during the First Committee meeting this autumn.

For the UN community, your petition is an important reminder that the relevance of nuclear disarmament extends really far beyond our conference rooms. The abhorrence of nuclear weapons and the urgency of their complete elimination is of greatest importance to our world citizens, and it has been a top priority for the United Nations, as you know.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Hibakusha in sharing their testimony of unspeakable horrors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Every time I listen to them, listen to you in person, it really moves me tremendously. The authority with which you speak really cuts across cultures and generations and has moved so many people in their efforts towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Your advocacy for nuclear disarmament is an unparalleled force for good. The impressive number of signatures that you collected to date is a very clear indication of the impact of your work. So again, thank you so very much for your tireless efforts.

Sadly nearly 75 years after the atomic bombings, the average age of the Hibakusha is growing. But your voices are not diminishing and I’m really heartened also by your extensive efforts to reach out to young people as well. I see that in this conference today, there are a lot of younger people also listening in and participating and that’s exactly what we really want to see. Because encouraging youth to become the force towards nuclear disarmament really is critical in terms of preserving your message for future generations, and of course, ultimately, in bringing about a world free of nuclear weapons.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted all of us with the uncomfortable truth, if you will, that events deemed improbable can occur with the potential to sow devastation in ways that seemed really not imaginable. Global crises do not stop at national borders, I think we are seeing that, and they require therefore a collective response. For all the hardships it has inflicted, the pandemic also has a potential, I hope, to unite societies, institutions and individuals -- all of us. I hope that in achieving solidarity through this crisis, we can also transcend our entrenched divisions and achieve other difficult but necessary goals, especially, the urgent goal of a total elimination of nuclear weapons.

We have been teleworking at the UN, and it’s been more than 5 weeks now. But yesterday I went into the UN to record a video message that we will be putting online on Monday, which should have been the opening of the NPT Review Conference. And the message that I really want to convey is that States Parties really should, even take advantage of the postponement, so that they can fill the gap -- they can actually bridge the gap and find common ground for moving forward in nuclear disarmament methods.

In the face of the heightened global tensions and also continued, and rather unfortunate, erosion of the international arms control architecture, progress towards nuclear disarmament really is more urgent than before. The Hibakusha represent the human face of nuclear destruction, and your efforts can remind policymakers that any use of nuclear weapons would be a human tragedy on an unprecedented scale. And I am therefore grateful to every person who has signed this petition and pledge to do my utmost towards the fulfillment of our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

I hope that some of you read looked at the message that we posted on the ODA’s website on the impact of COVID-19. One of the very important messages that we want to convey is that we really have to put humanity at the center of our security. And I think that COVID-19 is really telling humankind to do so. And that is one of the central themes that we also need to remember in our efforts towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

I thank you very much for this, and I’m very much looking forward to your conference also becoming even a greater, more forceful movements towards our shared objective.

Thank you very much.