**Testimony before the Massachusetts Legislature Joint Committee on Public Services**

**November 18, 2019**

**Regarding H. 2202 and S. 1516**

**AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE DIVESTMENT OF STATE PENSION FUNDS FROM NUCLEAR WEAPONS.**

My name is Jerry Ross and I am a member of First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Bedford. I am speaking in support of House bill 2202 and Senate 1516, **RELATIVE TO THE DIVESTMENT OF STATE PENSION FUNDS FROM NUCLEAR WEAPONS.**

The existence of nuclear weapons has from the very first presented the world not only with an existential dilemma but a profoundly moral one. Upon witnessing the first test explosion of the atomic bomb he helped create, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer was heard to quote from the Hindu spiritual text the Bhagavad Gita. “Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

It will not surprise you today when I tell you most of the world’s religions have condemned nuclear weapons as immoral.

The World Council of Churches First Assembly in 1948 declared war with atomic weapons “a sin against God and a degradation of man.” The Sixth Assembly in 1983 called for their “outlaw as a crime against humanity.” The 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation reaffirmed that call, and reiterated it in 2014. Upon passage of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July of 2017, Religions for Peace, representing major faith traditions from around the word, including my own Unitarian Universalist faith, issued a world-wide statement endorsing the ban (a copy of which I have attached to my written remarks). As recently as May of this year, Soka Gakkai International, the world's largest Buddhist lay organization repeated its long-standing call for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Add to these, the specific appeals by Nobel laureate religious leaders Desmond Tutu and the Dali Lama, and finally Pope Francis’s 2017 statement that “the very possession of nuclear weapons, is to is to be firmly condemned.”

But we really do not need the world’s religions to tell us nuclear weapons are immoral. We know that in our hearts. The merciless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of human beings is a crime beyond rational understanding, but not our moral reasoning.

Genocide does not happen all at once. It requires a long chain of actions that lead to that moment of criminality, each actor along the way becoming complicit in the final act. Let us not participate in that chain of immorality by investing our citizens pension funds in companies that build or trade in these ghastly devices. The process of preventing the use of nuclear weapons begins with preventing their manufacture. Let that process begin here in Massachusetts.

Last year, I walked the streets of Hiroshima on an August day very like that terriblel one in 1945. I saw the bustle of life about me on a crystal clear morning, as men, women and children went about their lives, as we and our children and grandchildren do. Then I imagined that moment when all that humanity was extinguished and the ashes of 80,000 human beings rose into the sky. The survivors of that day are called the Hibakusha. I leave you with the words of one Hibakusha, Sankichi Toge, on a monument in Hiroshima Peace Park.

Give back my father, give back my mother,

Give grandpa back, grandma back,

Give me my sons and daughters back,

Give back the human race.