

Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. KISHIDA Fumio, Prime Minister of Japan
at the Commemorative High -Level Event on an FMCT
(19 September 2023, in New York, United States)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome and thank you for attending this Commemorative High-Level Event on an FMCT today.

Coming from the only country to have ever suffered from the atomic bombings during war, and as a Prime Minister hailing from Hiroshima and a responsible Japanese political leader, I vow to surely advance every realistic step towards a world without nuclear weapons, no matter how difficult and lengthy the path may be. Since the first day I became a politician, I have made nuclear disarmament my lifelong mission.

I, however, must admit my growing sense of urgency that the obstacles that need to be overcome to achieve my goal are only becoming greater given the current international situation. It goes without saying that Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its threats to use nuclear weapons have only made the goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons further remote. This is in addition to the continued deepening of division besetting the international community.

Now, for the first time since the peak of the Cold War, the world is on the cusp of a reversal of the decreasing trend of the global number of nuclear arsenals. The rapid buildup of nuclear arsenals by a certain country could spark a nuclear arms race involving other countries. Should such a situation occur, the flame of unwavering efforts made all around the world aspiring for peace and passed over generations will be put at risk.

Shouldn't we limit the quantitative improvement of nuclear weapons by

banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons now to maintain the declining trend of global nuclear arsenals?

This is exactly what an FMCT aims to achieve. Stopping the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. The idea is to constrain the number of nuclear weapons at its root. The concept of an FMCT was proposed 30 years ago. Hence, experts have engaged in numerous dialogues over its technical elements. Unfortunately, negotiations on an FMCT have still not begun, but we are in need of an FMCT than ever before.

At last year's NPT Review Conference, to which I attended in person, I proposed the “Hiroshima Action Plan” and called for the immediate commencement of negotiations on an FMCT. And in the “G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament,” which we issued at the G7 Summit in Hiroshima this May, we urged all countries to refocus their political attention on an FMCT.

As political leaders, we must take the lead to ensure trust in the NPT regime, the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is maintained, and to prevent further divisions amongst ourselves. I have a strong sense of urgency about the current situation surrounding the NPT, exemplified by the results of last year's NPT Review Conference. It is impossible to prevent division taking hold in the world unless nuclear-weapon States proactively fulfill their obligations under the NPT and all Member States respond in kind by maintaining and advancing the NPT regime.

“A New Agenda for Peace” proposed by UN Secretary-General Guterres points out the deadlock of existing disarmament institutions and the need to reinvigorate them. I also share the concern that the division besetting the world over nuclear disarmament will be more entrenched should the current stagnation continue. The NPT regime is a common asset for all of humankind that is too important to be put at risk.

Let us collectively pull together our ideas and wisdom. The “Hiroshima Action Plan,” which I proposed, provides a foundation for this. There must be more that can be done, including further reducing the number of nuclear weapons and improving transparency among nuclear weapon States. We need to see concrete actions to heed the voices raised around the world. And as non-nuclear weapons States, let us also muster our wisdom and work unitedly to revitalize the existing disarmament machinery.

On the thirtieth year after the announcement of the idea of an FMCT, what we need now is strong political attention for commencing negotiations. I am encouraged that so many political leaders from major countries are participating in this event today. This event will surely serve as an opportunity to reinvigorate discussions on an FMCT and work towards the early commencement of negotiations, which in turn will lead to the revitalization and strengthening of the NPT regime.

Let us move away from confrontation and move towards cooperation. I truly hope that the ideas and passion that will be shared by all of you here today will help refocus political attention towards realizing the FMCT, and further help “mainstreaming” nuclear disarmament so as to realize a world without nuclear weapons.

Let us work together to make today a new beginning towards the commencement of negotiations on an FMCT.

Thank you.