

(Provisional Translation)
Opening Remarks by Prime Minister Kishida
at the High-Level Meeting to Launch
the Friends of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT Friends)
September 23, 2024

Distinguished high-level representatives,

Let me start with thanking all of you for gathering here today. As a native of Hiroshima, the city that was devastated by atomic bombing, I am delighted to launch today the Friends of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) with the representatives of the participating countries. This launch is literally to wrap up my efforts to advance nuclear disarmament diplomacy that I have been working on since my time as Minister for Foreign Affairs and since becoming Prime Minister.

Next year, we will mark 80 years since we witnessed the first nuclear test in human history and the subsequent devastation caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In my hometown of Hiroshima, the "Flame of Peace," which symbolizes the resolve and hope of the Hibakusha--atomic bombing survivors--for a world without nuclear weapons, continues to burn without being extinguished for a moment until the day when all such weapons have disappeared from the earth.

About 60 years ago, at the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. President Kennedy stated that humanity lived under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, and appealed for the abolition of those weapons. Later, in 1993, at the same UN General Assembly, President Clinton stated that his country was working with Russia and others to take that sword down, to lock it away in a secure vault where we hope and pray it will remain forever.

And now, the era we call "the post-Cold War" has already passed, and we are facing the most severe and complex international security environment since the end of the World War II, where the international community is becoming increasingly divided and confrontational. This nuclear sword, hanging by the slenderest of threads over the heads of every human being, is swinging wildly again.

We are on the brink of a possible reversal of the downward trend in the number of nuclear weapons since the Cold War. The rapid buildup of nuclear capabilities by some countries in an untransparent manner could ignite an arms race that would draw other countries in.

UN Secretary-General Guterres, pointed out the deadlock of some existing disarmament institutions and the need to revitalize them in his "New Agenda for Peace." I too am concerned that if this stalemate continues, the world will become even more divided.

The NPT regime, the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, is a common asset of humanity that is too precious to lose. We, the political leaders, must now take the lead to maintain confidence in this regime.

With this in mind, I myself as the Prime Minister of Japan, attended the NPT Review Conference in 2022 and announced the "Hiroshima Action Plan." Following that, I worked on the G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision for Nuclear Disarmament issued last May that called on all countries to refocus political attention on the FMCT.

The FMCT is a framework for maintaining the trend of a global decline in the number of nuclear weapons by limiting the quantitative increase in nuclear weapons. Thirty years have passed since President Clinton proposed the concept, and experts have continued discussion over technical aspects of the FMCT.

Now is the time for strong political will to begin negotiations that materialize those experts' discussions. I am convinced that creating momentum for an early start of FMCT negotiations will lead to the maintenance and strengthening of the NPT regime in the run-up to the 2026 NPT Review Conference.

About 80 years ago, the Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced firsthand the horror of nuclear weapons, which robbed people of their "human dignity." These people are already advanced in years. Along with their wish for a world without nuclear weapons, we need to promote the understanding of the realities of the atomic bombings to the world and to future generations.

Next year, which will mark 80th year since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan will work on conveying the realities of the atomic bombings, focusing on three areas: sending Hibakushas and the youth overseas, promoting visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and strengthening communication with the world. On that basis, we, the political leaders of the world, must recognize that we have the responsibility to one day lock the nuclear sword of Damocles away in a secure vault where we hope and pray it will remain forever.

As a native of Hiroshima, the city that was devastated by atomic bombing, and as a responsible politician of Japan, the only country to have suffered atomic bombings during war, I pledge to continue to support realistic steps toward a world without nuclear weapons. And above all, I would like to advance efforts toward nuclear disarmament so that the day will finally come when the "Flame of Peace" be extinguished after the resolve and hope of the Hibakusha fulfilled.

Japan will promote this FMCT Friends initiative in cooperation with the founding members of the group, who are gathered here. Let's work harder together.

Thank you for your attention.

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