

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

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WARMONGERING BIGGEST THREAT TO ACHIEVING SDGs, BUT CAN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD STOP IT?



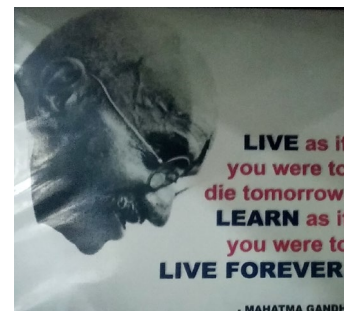
WARMONGERS NEED TO BE STOPPED



NEED A GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT



MULTIPOLAR WORLD IN THE MAKING



LIVE as if you were to die tomorrow. LEARN as if you were to LIVE FOREVER.

- MAHATMA GANDHI

WE SHARE COMMON VALUES, INCLUDING COMPASSION, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY. AS SUCH, THEY CAN PROVIDE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PEACE - KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV, PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our 13th issue of Sustainable Development Observer, a little bit late this time because I was on assignments in Kazakhstan and India. Anyway it is better to be late than never.

This month we focus on warmongering and sustainable development goals, prompted by an event I covered for IDN InDepth News from Kazakhstan – the 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions – a gathering of over 300 religious leaders representing the Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish faiths.

Kazakhstan was once the meeting place of traders and travellers from the East to the West, known as the Silk Route. As Pope Francis noted in his keynote address to the Congress: "We are meeting in a country traversed down the centuries by great caravans. In these lands, not least through the ancient silk route, many histories, ideas, faiths and hopes have intersected, may Kazakhstan be once more a land of encounter between those who come from afar." Please read my report in this issue for more perspectives on the issue.

I would like to draw your attention to the comments in the first article where Joseph Gerson, *President of the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common* says, "one wants to weep, to scream, at the contradiction between the vision, hopes and ceremonies embedded in the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and the reality that humanity is now hostage to the most dangerous nuclear confrontation since Cuban Missile Crisis". The need of the hour is for millions of people to come out to the streets of capitals around the world to demand from politicians that the warmongering need to stop. In the 1980s when Europe was threatened with nuclear annihilation that did happen, but, there is no signs this mobilisation is happening now.

On a more optimistic note, we bring you 2 articles on the shaping of a multipolar world with two recent meetings of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Eastern Economic Forum. The western global media all but ignored these meeting. The only news worthy item they could extract from the SCO meeting was Indian Prime Minister Modi's comments that "this is not the time for war" which was interpreted as him warning Putin, but, one may also interpret it a warning to other warmongers as well who are arming the Ukrainians to continue the war.

"We need to ensure implementation of the roadmap for SCO member states to expand shares of local currency settlement, better develop the system for cross-border payment and settlement in local currencies, work for the establishment of an SCO development bank, and thus speed up regional economic integration," China's President Xi Jinping said in his address to the summit. But, these important developments in shaping a global financial architecture was not news for the western media. In his address to the summit, Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that the task is transforming the SCO into a global economic platform, noting the huge economic potential of the SCO member states that account for nearly a quarter of the world's GDP or more than \$23 trillion. These are important developments that SDO brings to you in this issue.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor

Issue 13 – September 2022
Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant
To Achieving The SDGs in The
Post-COVID Era

INDEX

Editorial	2
Era of Nuclear Blackmail Must End	3
Kazakhstan, The Center of a New Route of Global Relationships?	6
Shanghai Cooperation Could Unite the Region's Big Powers to Drive the Global Economy	8
An Inexorable Multipolar World Order	11
Nuclear Weapons are a Clear Threat To a Sustainable Future for Humanity	14
The Culture of Peace Bolsters the Potential for Sustainable Peace Building	15
Snippets of News Items from Non-IDN Sources	19
Recent Reports from Regional and International Organisations	20
Exhibition Educates Youth on the Dangers of Nuclear Weapons	21



The "Good Defeats Evil" sculpture, located at UN Headquarters in New York, depicts an allegorical St. George slaying a double-headed dragon. The dragon is created from fragments of Soviet SS-20 and United States Pershing nuclear missiles. Photo: UN Photo/Milton Grant

The Era of Nuclear Blackmail Must End

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS — When the United Nations commemorated the annual International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on September 26, the President of the General Assembly (GA) Csaba Kőrösi reminded delegates of the statue of Saint—"found in the ruins of Nagasaki, charred and mottled from the atomic blast"—and which now stands at the centre of UN's permanent collection of

memorable anti-nuclear artefacts in the Secretariat building.

"She is there to remind us of a past that must never be repeated. For my part, I will heed her grim warning. I will do whatever I can to bring us closer to our dream: a world that is safe from the scourge of war," he added.

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons has been observed annually since 2014. The General Assembly declared the International Day in December 2013, in its resolution 68/32, as a follow-up to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament held on 26 September 2013 in New York.

The United States detonated two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, respectively. The two bombings killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, mostly civilians. But that bombing still remains as the only use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict.

In the first days of this year, the GA president pointed out that the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states—the US, UK, France, Russia and China—jointly affirmed that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought".

The other four nuclear powers include India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.

"Only nine months later, tensions between world powers are reaching new highs. And we are again, permanently 100 to 110 seconds away from launching a nuclear strike to be followed by responses."

The war in Ukraine has raised credible risks of global nuclear disaster, and, as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned, there are certain circles are "playing with fire".

"I am particularly appalled by the recurring, thinly veiled threats of nuclear strikes. Tactical strikes, it is often added, but we all know that such a conflict would never stay at the tactical level."

On the Korean Peninsula, he reminded delegates the nuclear threat continues to pose an unacceptable risk to the region and the world.

Meanwhile, arsenals across the world are filled with more than 13,000 warheads. Investments in these weapons continue to increase while too many people struggle to buy food, educate their children, and keep warm, the GA President declared.

Still, Kazakhstan is cited as a country that took a pioneering role in giving up its weapons and shutting down its nuclear test site.

Between 1949 to 1989, an estimated 456 Soviet nuclear tests, including 116 atmospheric tests, were carried out at the Semipalatinsk test site, with devastating long-term consequences for human health and the environment. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan inherited approximately 1,400 Soviet nuclear warheads, which it subsequently relinquished, recognising that its security was best achieved through disarmament.

Former Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev was the first among newly independent former Soviet states to call for the elimination of nuclear weapons and the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Central Asian region.

Kazakhstan volunteered to return all nuclear weapons to Russia, signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and entered the world as a non-nuclear state.

In an interview with IDN, Joseph Gerson, *President of the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security and Vice-President of the International Peace Bureau*, said, "one wants to weep, to scream, at the contradiction between the vision, hopes and ceremonies embedded in the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and the reality that humanity is now hostage to the most dangerous nuclear confrontation since Cuban Missile Crisis".

In August, on the eve of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference, Secretary-General António Guterres warned that humanity was "just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation". In these circumstances, our first and urgent priority must be preventing a nuclear war.

Gerson said Russian, and US leaders are playing with nuclear fire that could consume us all as they move eyeball to eyeball in the spiralling escalation of the Ukrainian war.

As Russian President Vladimir Putin moves to annex more of Ukraine, ostensibly making them part of Russia, he threatens to use nuclear weapons to "protect" Russia and warns that he is not bluffing, he noted.

"Backed by the US and NATO, President Zelensky repeats his commitment to win back all of the territories conquered by Russia. We thus face the danger of an endless war that bleeds Russian resources or a decisive defeat of Russian forces, each of which would make Putin's rule vulnerable and raise the possibility of Russia launching tactical nuclear weapons to terrorize Kyiv into bowing to Moscow's demands," Gerson warned.

In response to Putin's nuclear sabre rattling, the Biden Administration responds that it will "respond decisively", which implies possible nuclear retaliation. But given political and nationalist forces in each of the superpowers, it will be more than difficult for either leader to accept the appearance of defeat".

"And thus, the fate of humanity hangs in the balance," he declared.

The UN meeting on the total elimination of nuclear weapons took place amid a *Global Appeal to "end the nuclear threat, abolish nuclear weapons and shift the weapons budgets and investments to support public health, COVID-19 recovery, the climate and sustainable development"*.

The appeal came from Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND), a global network of legislators working on a range of initiatives to prevent nuclear proliferation and to achieve a nuclear-weapons-free world.

Addressing delegates, the UN Chief said in an era of "nuclear blackmail", countries should step back from the threat of potential global catastrophe and recommit to peace.

"Nuclear weapons are the most destructive power ever created. They offer no security—just carnage and chaos. Their elimination would be the greatest gift we could bestow on future generations," he said.

Guterres recalled that the Cold War had brought humanity "within minutes of annihilation". Yet decades after it ended, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, "we can hear once again the rattling of nuclear sabres". he said.

"Let me be clear. The era of nuclear blackmail must end. The idea that any country could fight and win a nuclear war is deranged. Any use of a nuclear weapon would incite a humanitarian Armageddon. We need to step back."

The Secretary-General also spoke of his disappointment after countries failed to reach consensus at a conference last month to review the landmark Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the only binding commitment to the goal of disarmament by States which officially stockpile nuclear weapons.

Following four weeks of intense negotiations at UN Headquarters, delegations left without an outcome document because Russia objected to the text about its control over Ukrainian nuclear facilities.

The UN Chief pledged not to give up and urged countries "to use every avenue of dialogue, diplomacy and negotiation to ease tensions, reduce risk and eliminate the nuclear threat."

Meanwhile, Gerson also pointed out that the US-Chinese confrontation over Taiwan, Indian-Pakistani confrontations over Kashmir, and the nine nuclear powers' nuclear arms races all carry the same danger of nuclear Armageddon.

"The International Day for the Complete Elimination of Nuclear Weapons provided an opportunity to refocus our attention on the imminent and long-term nuclear dangers. Our first priority must be preventing nuclear war."

This dictates the urgency of winning an immediate ceasefire and negotiated compromise settlement to the Ukraine War and an end to the US and Chinese provocative military manoeuvres near Taiwan and in the South China Sea.

"As we face new Cold Wars with no shared assumptions or guardrails to contain tensions and to prevent catastrophic miscalculations, the US and Russia and the US and China must reengage in the process of re-establishing strategic stability. It can serve as the foundation for negotiation of meaningful arms control and disarmament agreements," warned Gerson.

Without such steps, despite the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the vision and urgent need for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons—which is the only way to prevent nuclear war ultimately—will remain beyond our reach.

"If there is one truism that we must remember and act upon on this international day and tomorrow, it is the Hibakusha's (nuclear weapons victims) admonition that 'Human beings and nuclear weapons cannot coexist,'" he declared. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 29 September 2022]

This article was produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC on 29 September 2022.



Pope Francis delivering the keynote speech at the 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Nur Sultan. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

Kazakhstan, the Centre of a New Route of Global Relationships?

By Kalinga Seneviratne

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan — Pope Francis has raised the prospect of Kazakhstan becoming the centre of a new route connecting the East and West, but this time a route that builds on human relations and respect.

Kazakhstan was once the meeting place of traders and travellers travelling from the East to the West, known as the Silk Route. In the 21st century, the Chinese are trying to revive these routes via railways and highways to promote trade across the world known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

While inaugurating the *Seventh Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions* in the Kazakh capital on September 14, the Pontiff gave a new definition to such a route to wean humanity away from purely material pursuits.

"We are meeting in a country traversed down the centuries by great caravans. In these lands, not least through the ancient silk route, many histories, ideas, faiths and hopes have intersected," said Pope Francis addressing 1000 delegates—mainly spiritual leaders from 50 countries. "May Kazakhstan be once more a land of encounter between those who come from afar."

He added that such a route should be "centered on human relationships: on respect, sincere dialogue, respect for the inviolable dignity of each human being and mutual cooperation".

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pointed out that in the 12th to 14th centuries, Nur-Sultan was home to Buddhist temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques. "The Kazakh land has become a bridge between West and East," he noted, adding, "unfortunately, distrust, tension, and conflicts have returned to international relations".

Pointing out that the previous international security system is collapsing, he averred, "the solution to these problems is goodwill, dialogue, and cooperation".

The Pope made a passionate appeal for religious leaders to work towards eradicating "the injustice of global inequalities and imbalances...so forcefully brought out" by Covid-19.

"How many people, even today, lack ready access to vaccines?" he asked. "Let us be on their side, not on the side of those who have more and give less. Let us become prophetic and courageous voices of conscience."

"Poverty is precisely what enables the spread of epidemics and other great evils that flourish," argued the Pontiff. "As long as inequality and injustice continue to proliferate, there will be no end to viruses even worse than Covid—the viruses of hatred, violence and terrorism," he warned.

In the plenary sessions, many of the speakers representing major religions and various regions echoed the same message.

Professor Ahmed El Tayeb, Grand Imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar Islamic university, lamented that as we were about to recover from the pandemic, we have been overwhelmed by other disasters. "We have recently been affected by arrogant policies affecting the global economy, destroying people's lives," he noted. "It is painful (that) religion with its moral teachings is not guiding modern civilization."

Anthony Volokolamsk, chairman of external church relations of Moscow Patriarchy, quoting from a statement from the church's leader, said, "we have seen misrepresentation of facts, we hear words filled with hate against nations and peoples (which) spur people against dialogue and cooperation". He thanked the Forum provided by Congress for creating an opportunity to conduct such a dialogue.

"Civilization cannot be divided into good and bad," argued Li Guangfu, Chairman of the Chinese Taoist Association. "We need to develop mutual respect."

Saleh bin Abdul-Aziz Al ash-Sheikh, the official representative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the King of Saudi Arabia, also argued for building bridges between religions. "It is important that religion is not used to create chaos in society," he said. "We need to promote values of social responsibility." Thus, he added, the role of religious leaders should be to motivate others to practice charity, justice, righteousness and compassion.

Hirotsugu Terasaki, Vice President of the Japanese Lay Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai (photo above), pointed out that it is now more important than ever before to reach out to those in distress. Referring to teachings in the *Lotus Sutra* he argued that "one should have a sense of relief and joy when a person is helped to overcome what has seemed at one time to be a harrowing and intractable plight".

Expressing a sole voice from Africa, Dr Fidon Mwombeki, general secretary of the All-Africa Council of Churches, argued that there are people in all religions who don't respect the dignity of others, which creates conflict when others react. When IDN asked him later to explain this point further, he said, "when people don't meet, they have all these stereotypes, but when you meet, you discover that this is not what I thought".

Dr Mwombeki explained that in Africa, so many people think Islam is violent because of what is happening in Somalia, Zaire and northern Nigeria. "When I meet Muslim people here and see how they talk about Islam, its commitment to the human dignity of all, (I see) their attitude to life is different," he noted.

The Final Declaration

The final declaration of the Seventh Congress, presented at the end of the two-day meeting in the presence of Pope Francis, contained 35 points and recommendations. It affirmed that the purposes of the Congress and the Declaration is to guide contemporary and future generations of humankind in promoting a culture of mutual respect and peacefulness by making available a document that could be used in public administration of any country in the world, as well as by international organizations, including UN institutions.

Maulen Ashimbayev, Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, said after the declaration was read out that the document will be presented to the members of the United Nations at the forthcoming UN General Assembly sessions.

The Declaration also instructed the Secretariat of the Congress to develop a concept paper for the development of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions as a global interreligious dialogue platform for the decade of 2023-2033.

In wrapping up the proceedings of the Seventh Congress, Kazakh President Tokayev said that it is vital to put to good use the peace-making potential of religions and unite the efforts of spiritual leaders to pursue long-term stability.

"As we face an increasingly turbulent geopolitical post-pandemic world, it becomes more crucial to develop new approaches to strengthening inter-civilizational dialogue and trust at the global level. I believe that this forum made a significant contribution to this vital ongoing work," Tokayev noted.

He also thanked Pope Francis for visiting the country and attending the Congress, which he thinks would help to give better exposure globally for the ideas and recommendations expressed in the final declaration.

It was agreed at the final session that the Eighth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions will be held in Nur-Sultan in three years in September 2025. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 17 September 2022]

This article was produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC on 17 September 2022.



Group photo of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation leaders taken in Uzbekistan. Photo: digwatch

Shanghai Organization Could Unite Region's Big Powers to Drive the Global Economy

By Kalinga Seneviratne

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan — For the first time, the summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) attracted international and regional media attention because the Ukraine crisis has made the region's powerhouses China, Russia and India major players in the global economy.

The 22nd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO took place in the historical city of Samarkand, in Uzbekistan, on September 15 and 16.

The three leaders, China's Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin and India's Narendra Modi, were in the same room for the first time since the Ukraine crisis unfolded.

Though the media focused on bilateral meetings that took place (or not) between these leaders, the real importance of this meeting should be on at least two areas of utmost importance for the international community—the developing connectivity across Central Asia that is reigniting memories of the great Silk Routes of the past that opened up trade and cultural exchanges between the East and West, and moves towards building a new global financial architecture that has been quietly discussed within SCO for a few years now.

In addition to the three major economies of the world, SCO membership also includes energy-rich Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In contrast, Iran, another energy-rich nation, was approved to join the grouping this year. Two others, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were given dialogue partner status at this year's meeting.

According to a recent study by China's Qingdao Customs and Qingdao-based Ocean University, the total trade volume of SCO members increased from \$667.09 billion in 2001 to \$6.06 trillion in 2020. In addition, the share of SCO members in global trade rose from 5.4 per cent in 2001 to 17.5 per cent in 2020.

In 2003, heads of the SCO member-states signed a 20-year 'Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation intended to create a free trade zone within the SCO territory as a long-term goal, but such a plan has not materialized so far. However, an SCO inter-bank consortium has been established to facilitate funding for investment by member states and an SCO development bank is being planned.

In his address to the SCO summit, Chinese President Xi said, "SCO is an important constructive force in international and regional affairs" and that member states should enhance mutual support to uphold security and development interests. He warned member states to "guard against attempts by external forces to instigate 'color revolution', and jointly oppose interference in other countries internal affairs under any pretext".

Xi also reiterated China's desire to see its belt and road initiative (BRI) adopted more widely in the region with complementary national development strategies and regional cooperation initiatives.

Connectivity and a new global financial architecture has gathered added value since the Ukrainian crisis triggered western financial sanctions on Russia, which has in turn, seriously impacted international trade and financial transactions, raising questions about the global supply chains and banking procedures.

Xi's address to the Samarkand summit signalled that a new global economic architecture is being planned by SCO member states.

"We need to ensure implementation of the roadmap for SCO member states to expand shares of local currency settlement, better develop the system for cross-border payment and settlement in local currencies, work for the establishment of an SCO development bank, and thus speed up regional economic integration," Xi said in his address to the summit. He added that next year, China will host an SCO ministers' meeting on development cooperation and an industrial and supply chains forum.

"The year 2022 is an extraordinary year for the world," noted Adil Kaukenov, Senior Fellow, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies, in an interview with IDN. "Before we believed global system is more important than region, we used to discuss what is more important. (But now we think) the regional system gives us more stability in the global architecture. Now we see we need a parallel regional system because it makes us more stable because global can change suddenly."

Kaukenov believes that SCO, though its membership is small, its economic clout is big. "It is easier to focus, and now with Iran joining, it's big news ... because Iran for us is a big partner. We have a water project and also a railway linking Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan."

He points out further that Kazakhstan, as an energy-rich country in the centre of the region with good relations with China and Russia stand to gain a lot with expanding connectivity and cooperation in the region.

This point is reflected in the fact that when the Ukraine crisis erupted, two-thirds of oil exports of the country took place via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), the world's largest international oil transportation project involving Russian and Kazakh companies to the Russian port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea.

When the country's oil exports through this route were disrupted several times, Kazakhstan turned to another route, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, which runs through China, Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and the European countries.

In his address to the summit, Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that the task is transforming the SCO into a global economic platform, noting the huge economic potential of the SCO member states that account for nearly a quarter of the world's GDP or more than \$23 trillion.

"Our organization unites dynamically developing world economies with enormous human, resource, and technological potential.... We have at our disposal the richest reserves of energy resources, coal, rare metals, and sources of renewable energy," said Tokayev.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the summit put across a similar view. "Today, when the whole world is facing the challenges of economic recovery after the pandemic, the role of SCO becomes very important. SCO member countries contribute about 30 per cent of global GDP, and 40 per cent of the world's population also lives in SCO countries," he pointed out.

"The pandemic and the crisis in Ukraine caused many obstacles in global supply chains, due to which the whole world is facing an unprecedented energy and food crisis. SCO must make efforts to develop reliable, resilient and diversified supply chains in our region. This will require better connectivity, as well as it will be important that we all give each other full right to transit."

While China is focusing on building railways via the BRI, India is promoting its own connectivity with the region through the Chabahar Port project with Iran and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200 km multi-mode transport project that moves through India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

"There is a huge difference between China's BRI and India's Chabahar port or INSTC. China's BRI has some political aspirations attached to it. India's projects in Central Asia or the INSTC are free of political aspirations. They truly want to integrate with the Central Asian region," Dr Pravesh Kumar Gupta, Senior Research Associate at the Vivekananda International Foundation in New Delhi, told IDN.

He also added that in India's projects, the infrastructure is already there, while Chinese projects are mostly in the construction phase. "After the Ukraine crisis, Russia is now promoting southbound roads... both Chabahar Port and INSTC are going to be very relevant at this point of time."

India is due to take over the presidency of SCO from Uzbekistan at the end of this year. "Our priority, as stated by Modi in his speech, is to promote the cultural and economic potential of SCO... we need to promote the region as a manufacturing hub, and we need to take care of supply chains," says Dr Gupta.

He is of the view that China is not promoting cultural exchanges in the region because much of the cultural influences in the region in the past came from Buddhism, which originated in India. "We have a lot of similarities in Central Asian (musical) cultures too, and there are even Hindus traces in Central Asian culture," he added.

There was one silver lining in the rivalry between India and China in the region. Modi mentioned in his address that World Health Organization's (WHO) first and only global centre for traditional medicine has been established in Gujarat in April 2022, and "India will initiate a new SCO working group on traditional medicine".

President Xi asserted that SCO needs to establish people-to-people cultural exchanges, and one of the points he mentioned was China establishing a forum on traditional medicine. [IDN-InDepthNews – 21 September 2022]

An Inexorable Multipolar World Order

By Somar Wijayadasa

NEW YORK — Despite the mayhem around the world—war in Ukraine, geopolitical confrontations, myriad of sanctions, energy crisis, hyperinflation, climate catastrophes, and unrelenting health issues—a few countries in the Eastern hemisphere held two noteworthy summits perhaps in an effort to bring some sense and stability to our deeply convoluted world.



A window with a logo of the 2022 Eastern Economic Forum seen at the Far Eastern Federal University campus, Vladivostok. Photo: CGTN

A closer look at these two significant events prove that a tectonic shift is taking place in international relations with emphasis on creating a multipolar world order.

“On the way to a multipolar world”

Russia hosted its Seventh Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, from September 5-8. Focused on international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, Russia's President Vladimir Putin established the forum in 2015 to boost investments into Russia's Far Eastern regions.

Since its inception, more than 2,700 investment projects have been implemented, and created over 120,000 jobs. This year's forum included more than 90 business events and attracted more than 5,000 visitors from 67 countries.

There were discussions on diverse topics such as investment and trade in the Arctic and Far Eastern regions of Russia, the electric power industry in the Far East, the promotion of Russian software, mineral resources and mineral processing, and aircraft construction.

Saying that the economy of Asian countries is growing faster than Western countries, Putin emphasized that "countries in the Asia-Pacific region have become new centers of economic and technological growth, attracting human resources, capital and manufacturing".

During Putin stated in his speech at the EEF that "over the past 10 years, the GDP of Asian countries has grown annually by approximately 5%, while the world's - by 3%; the GDP of the US - by 2%, the EU by 1.2%". Putin is confident that the share of Asian economies in global GDP will grow from 37.1% in 2015 to 45% in 2027.

Iran signed 17 documents on cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan increasing their annual bilateral trade to \$1 billion. Azerbaijan, Russia, and Iran agreed to develop the International North-South Transport Corridor linking Russia to the Persian Gulf.

The EEC Forum ended with nearly \$50 billion in deals.

Pointing out that “Western countries have undermined the foundations of the global economic system forged over the centuries”, Putin told participants that the outdated uni-polar model is being replaced by a new world order based on the fundamental principles of justice and equality, recognizing the rights of all countries and people on a sovereign path of development.

Without referring to the hundreds of billions of Russia’s dollars frozen in the US and other foreign countries, Putin underscored, “There is a loss of confidence in the dollar, the euro and the pound sterling as currencies in which to conduct transactions, hold assets and reserves”. Putin believes that “this tendency pushes Russia and many other nations to switch to other currencies, most notably the Chinese yuan”.

The world is gradually moving away from using such unreliable, compromised currencies, Putin emphasized, adding that even US allies are cutting their dollar assets.

Reiterating that International law has been repeatedly trampled on, Putin remarked: “Now many people claim that Russia is violating international law. I think that this is absolutely untrue. Who started the war in Iraq without any UN sanctions? Who destroyed Yugoslavia under plausible pretexts? Who unleashed a war in the center of Europe by bombing Belgrade? No one remembered the principles of international law then”.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The SCO held its summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan from September 15 to 16.

Created by Russia and China in 2001 as a counterweight to US influence, SCO is the world’s largest regional, political, economic and security organization aimed at fostering trust and developing economic and humanitarian ties in Asia. All its relations are built on the basis of mutual respect for each other’s interests and mutual benefit.

Its members are China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The observer countries are Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia, and its partner countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.

It is noteworthy that four SCO members wield nuclear weapons, and are partners in China’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative, the massive infrastructure project that stretches from East Asia to Europe.

In terms of geographic scope and population, SCO covers approximately 60% of the area of Eurasia, 40% of the world population, and more than 30% of global GDP.

The current SCO summit in Samarkand finalized the admission of Iran, and granted the status of a dialogue partner to Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Belarus applied for full membership in the SCO.

Four SCO members are in the BRICS alliance that is also poised to expand in 2023 as Iran and Argentina officially applied for its membership, and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt have shown interest in joining the bloc.

On the final day of the summit, more than 40 agreements were signed and adopted the

Samarkand Declaration

Recognizing the threat of chemical and biological terrorism, the SCO members called for compliance with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons. They stressed the importance of the early destruction of all declared stockpiles of chemical weapons.

The SCO reaffirmed its commitment to a more representative, democratic, just, and a multipolar world order that is based on the universally recognized principles of international law, multilateralism, equal, common, indivisible, comprehensive, and sustainable security.

The grouping also called for creating a transparent international energy market and reducing the existing trade barriers.

Addressing the meeting, Russia's President Vladimir Putin stressed the deepening economic ties between China and Russia, noting bilateral trade exceeded \$140 billion last year. "I am convinced", he said, "that in the near future we will increase our annual trade turnover to \$200 billion or more".

Referring to protests that toppled unpopular regimes in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, China's President Xi Jinping urged SCO members to strive to "prevent foreign forces from staging colour revolutions in our countries, and offered to train 2,000 police officers, to set up a regional counterterrorism training center and strengthen law enforcement capacity building.

Xi invited SCO members to join China's Global Security Initiative, a concept that includes the idea that no country should strengthen its own security at the expense of others.

Saying that it is also aimed at "effectively responding to non-traditional security challenges", Xi added "We need to crack down on the three forces of evil—religious extremism, ethnic separatism and international terrorism.

Xi also said that the "regional countries must firmly uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core and the international order based on international law, promote the common values of all mankind, abandon zero-sum games and bloc politics".

The SCO plans to prepare a single list of terrorist, separatist and extremist groups whose activities are banned on the territories of the member states. This move aims to counter the threat posed by them to the region.

Most significantly, during President Vladimir Putin's bilateral meetings with President Xi Jinping, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi the concerns about the War in Ukraine were unavoidable.

During his meeting with Xi, Putin praised China's "balanced position" on the Ukraine war, and acknowledged that Xi had "questions and concerns" over Russia's faltering invasion of Ukraine.

During his meeting with Putin, Modi said, "Today's era is not of war" and emphasized the importance of "democracy, dialogue and diplomacy" and the need to "move onto a path of peace" in Ukraine.

Putin's response to both Xi and Modi was "I know your position and concerns on the conflict in Ukraine. We want all of this to end as soon as possible".

"Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning".—Winston Churchill. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 20 September 2022]

Nuclear Weapons Are a Clear Threat to A Sustainable Future for Humanity

By Hidehiko Yuzaki, Governor of Hiroshima, Japan

UNITED NATIONS — In considering nuclear weapons and sustainability, I would like to begin by examining the Ukrainian crisis. Looking at the relationship between the Ukrainian crisis and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the crisis has seriously affected initiatives for all the SDGs, not only in Ukraine but also in the rest of the world. For example, the recent decline in wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine, which together account for nearly 30% of global wheat supplies, has exacerbated the food crisis. Such negative impacts on the achievement of the SDGs are becoming evident on a global scale.



Meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (right) in front of the Hiroshima (banner) exhibition at United Nations on August 1, 2022. Source: Mariko Komatsu

Moreover, in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, the world has been faced with nuclear dangers due to Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons and the Russian military's attack on a nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Seventy-seven years ago, Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered catastrophic damages in every aspect, including industrial and living infrastructure, educational institutions, and healthcare services, with their soil, forests, and ocean seriously contaminated. The use of nuclear weapons would inflict devastating damages on the achievement of every SDG.

Before anything else, many precious lives were lost, including women, children, and the elderly. At the present moment, when we are faced with the Ukrainian crisis, we should remind ourselves again that nuclear weapons constitute an unequivocal threat to the sustainable future of humanity.

Several people argue that the possession of nuclear weapons is acceptable as long as they are not used. However, even if not used, nuclear weapons continue to have significant negative impacts on the achievement of the SDGs. Just the production and possession of these weapons have brought about various problems, for example, health damage to uranium miners during the production process, human suffering as well as ocean and forest contamination resulting from nuclear tests, and environmental pollution caused by nuclear waste, to name but a few.

Both Hiroshima and Nagasaki succeeded in reviving themselves from the ashes. However, the precious human lives lost in the nuclear calamity and genetic damage from exposure to radiation could never be restored. Due to this tragedy, an infinite number of traditional assets cannot be passed on to the later generations. It is important to prevent risks before they turn into a catastrophe.



Hiroshima Peace memorial Park. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

As far as the climate change issue is concerned, there are two ways to deal with it, "mitigation" and "adaptation," but there can be no adaptation to the nuclear weapons problem, mitigation is difficult, and once nuclear weapons are used, that's it. In that sense, the issue of nuclear weapons is more serious than climate change, and prevention is the only solution. Now it is our challenge to realize prevention by collecting the wisdom of humanity.

SDGs have focused on comprehensive development in the environment, society and economy fields. Taking into consideration the impact of nuclear weapons on the sustainability of our society, I believe we will need to add safety and security to the next global agenda post the SDGs.

- To this end, HOPE/Hiroshima Prefecture has launched the *Global Alliance "Sustainable Peace and Prosperity for All"*, or GASPPA. This is a new civil society platform that mainly collaborates with international NGOs and concentrates on sustainability for humankind and the Earth.

The concept phrase for GASPPA is the "Sustainable future is only possible when we eliminate our nuclear weapons." Collaborating with people carrying out activities primarily in the fields of society and the environment, which are realms outside of nuclear arms, GASPPA is working toward the goal of positioning the abolition of nuclear weapons as a shared challenge for humankind in the post-SDG years, based on the concept of "Sustainable Peace and Prosperity for All."

** The above is the content of Hiroshima Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki's speech at a side event (co-hosted by Nagasaki and Hiroshima Prefectures) under the theme "Nexus between Nuclear Disarmament and Sustainable Future" held at UN Headquarters on August 1, the first day of the 2022 NPT Review Conference.*

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 24 August 2022]



The Culture of Peace Bolsters the Potential for Sustainable Peacebuilding

By Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury

NEW YORK — 23 years ago today, on 13 September 1999, the United Nations adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, a monumental document that transcends boundaries,

cultures, societies, and nations. It was an honor for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of this historic norm-setting document by the United Nations General Assembly.

That document asserts that inherent in the culture of peace is a set of values, modes of behaviour and ways of life. I was highly privileged to introduce at the 53rd Session of UN General Assembly on its concluding day that resolution for adoption without a vote presenting the consensus text reached under my chairmanship.

20th anniversary of the culture of peace decision was the last in-person High Level Forum in 2019. After two years of virtual Forums, on 6 September this year, President of the 76th General Assembly Abdulla Shahid convened the in-person High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace. That was the eleventh in the series of annual Forums, the first day-long Forum being convened by the 66th President Ambassador Nassir Al-Nasser in 2012.

As his Senior Special Advisor, I had the full responsibility of organizing this pioneering initiative on 14 September. It was a huge success particularly amongst the UN's civil society organizations which welcomed the opportunity they received to participate proactively along with the Member States and the rest of the UN system. Since then, the afternoon's Panel Discussion has been considered as the civil society component of the Forum all these years.

Mandated by the UNGA resolutions, the Presidents of the General Assembly have been convening the annual high-level forums since 2012. The Forum provides a platform for the Member States, civil society, and relevant stakeholders to deliberate on the continuing applicability of the Culture of Peace in the contemporary contexts.

The Forum also has been the only UN gathering which was addressed by the largest number of women Nobel Peace laureates—six times out of eleven Forums. Also, the Forum's panelists were always gender-balanced, on most occasions with more women, as was the case this year.

The Culture of Peace remains one of the key items for the General Assembly since 1997 when the Assembly decided to include a new and self-standing item to its agenda. This was followed by the UNGA resolution 52/15 of 20 November 1997 that proclaimed the year 2000 as the "International Year for the Culture of Peace" and GA resolution 53/25 of 10 November 1998, that proclaimed the period of 2001-2010 as the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World".

Over the years the scope of the Culture of Peace expanded allowing adoption by the General Assembly multiple resolutions on a wide range of issues relating to various areas of its Programme of Action.

This year's Forum theme was *"The Culture of Peace: Importance of justice, equality and inclusion for advancing peacebuilding"*.

It provided an opportunity to Member States, UN system and the civil society to explore and discuss ways to promote justice, equality, and inclusion for advancing peacebuilding and sustaining peace, especially through inculcation and promotion of the values of the Culture of Peace, as the concept note stated.

The concept note also underscored that "... there is no alternative to investing in peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a view to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account. Such vision encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict and addressing root causes. At the same time, there is an urgent need to eliminate discrimination and inequalities and promote social cohesion and inclusive development, to ensure no one is left behind. In this context, as elaborated in the UNGA resolution on the Culture of Peace, empowerment of people to address the challenges in a peaceful and non-violent way is an essential component."

The United Nations was born in 1945 out of World War II. The UN Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace was born in 1999 in the aftermath of the Cold War. Apart from the Charter, the Declaration and Program of Action is the only document which has focused so comprehensively on peace. Simply put, the Culture of Peace as a concept, as a motivation means that every one of us needs to consciously make peace and nonviolence a part of our daily existence. We should not isolate peace as something separate or distant.

Ever since the initiative taken by me in July 1997 to formally propose inclusion of a separate agenda item on the culture of peace in the UN General Assembly and its decision to do so, for the last two decades and half, my focus has been on advancing the culture of peace which aims at making peace and non-violence a part of our own self, our own values, our own personality. This has now become more pertinent amid the ever-increasing militarism, militarization and weaponization that is destroying both our planet and our people.

I believe there are two major developments that have the enormous opportunity to bolster the global movement for the culture of peace. Decision with regard to one has already been initiated while the other is still being brewed and hopefully will be ready by next week.

First the upcoming one—recognizing that education is a foundation for peace, tolerance, human rights and sustainable development, Secretary-General António Guterres has convened a Transforming Education Summit (TES) 16th to 19th September. Its three overarching principles are Country-led; Inclusive; Youth-inspired. All very relevant to creating the Culture of Peace. The Summit provides an opportunity to mobilize greater political ambition, commitment, and action to reverse the slide on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Summit should highlight that the Point 4.7 of that Goal includes, among others, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, women's equality as well as global citizenship as part of the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. It also calls on the international community to ensure that all learners acquire those by the year 2030. I hope the outcome document of the Summit would reflect 4.7 of the SDG 4 with strong emphasis.

Never has it been more important for us to learn about the world and understand its diversity. The task of educating children and young people to find non-aggressive means to relate with one another is of primary importance.

Targeting the individual is meaningful because there cannot be true peace unless every one of us value peace and non-violence and practices the culture of peace in their actions. Connecting the role of individuals to broader global objectives, Dr Martin Luther King Junior affirmed that "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." The UN Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace pays special attention to the individual's self-transformation.

All educational institutions need to offer opportunities that prepare the students not only to live fulfilling lives but also to be responsible and productive citizens of the world. For that, educators need to introduce holistic and empowering curricula that cultivate the culture of peace in each and every young mind.

Indeed, such educating for peace should be more appropriately called "*education for global citizenship*". Such learning cannot be achieved without well-intentioned, sustained, and systematic peace education that leads the way to the culture of peace.

The other major development was announced in 2021. At last year's Forum during the Panel Discussion, the peace activist and globally respected Mayor Kazumi Matsui of Hiroshima and President of Mayors for Peace in his virtual participation announced that "On the 7th of July this year, Mayors for Peace adopted its new Vision, titled: "*Vision for Peaceful Transformation to a Sustainable World*". One of the objectives set forth by the new Vision is to 'promote the culture of peace', in addition to the ongoing objectives, "realize a world without nuclear weapons," and "realize safe and resilient cities."

He added that "Under this new Vision, Mayors for Peace will continue making our utmost efforts toward our ultimate goal of realizing lasting world peace in solidarity with its 8,043 member cities in 165 countries and regions." This new vision would be placed at the center of the deliberations during 10th Annual General Conference of Mayors for Peace in Hiroshima this October.

These two developments—outcome of Transforming Education Summit and the Mayors of Peace initiative on the Culture of Peace—have the potential of making the Culture of Peace a major force in sustaining peace.

In conclusion I would reiterate that women have a major role to play in promoting the culture of peace in our violence-ridden societies, thereby bringing in lasting peace and reconciliation. While women are often the first victims of any conflict, they must also and always be recognized as key to the resolution of the conflict. It is my strong belief that unless women are engaged in advancing the culture of peace at equal levels with men, sustainable peace would continue to elude us.

In various parts of the world, women have shown great capacity as peacebuilders. They assumed activist roles while holding together their families and communities. At the grassroots and community levels, women have organized to resist militarization, to create space for dialogue and moderation and to weave together the shattered fabric of society. Through my field experiences, I am proud to recognize that involvement of women in the peace process in various conflict areas of the world has contributed immensely to ensuring longer term benefits for their present as well as future generations.

As has been rightly said, without peace, development is impossible, and without development unachievable, but without women, neither peace nor development is even conceivable.

Often, I am asked how the UN is doing in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. I believe that the Organization should own it fully and internalize its implementation throughout the UN system. Also, Secretary-General should prioritize the culture of peace as a part of his leadership agenda. He should make good use of this workable tool that UN possess to advance the objective of sustainable peace. Not using the tool of the culture of peace is behaving like a person who needs a car to go to work and has a car... but with a minimal interest in knowing how to drive it.

I would repeat for the umpteenth time what former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace laureate Kofi Annan had said: "Over the years we have come to realize that it is not enough to send peacekeeping forces to separate warring parties. It is not enough to engage in peace-building efforts after societies have been ravaged by conflict. It is not enough to conduct preventive diplomacy. All of this is essential work, but we want enduring results. We need, in short, the culture of peace."

I continue to emphasize that The Culture of Peace is not a quick fix. It is a movement, not a revolution!

One voice creates a ripple—many ripples make a wave—collectively, our voices for the culture of peace can transform the world.

** Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury is the Founder of the Global Movement for The Culture of Peace (GMCoP), Permanent Representative of Bangladesh (1996-2001) and Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations (2002-2007).*

[IDN-InDepthNews – 13 September 2022]



Multi-Religious delegates at the 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Nur Sultan, Kazakstan. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne



Drought in parts of Africa puts children "one disease away from catastrophe" says UNICEF

Nigeria and Somalia are "just one disease away from catastrophe" as ongoing droughts, conflict and regional insecurity drive an increase in hunger and potentially fatal diseases, warns UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. "The only way to stop this crisis is for governments, donors, and the international community to step up funding to meet children's most acute needs, and provide long-term flexible support to break the cycle of crisis," Russell adds.

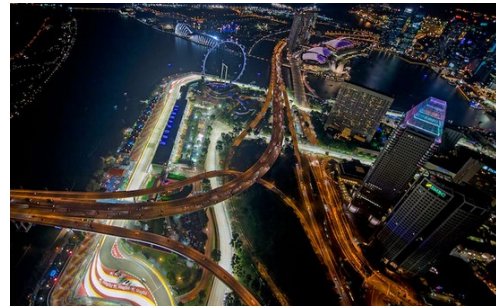
Full Story: [Xinhua News Agency \(China\)](#)-

<https://english.news.cn/20220824/159af29f7d9b493aa4c44b962be>

[cce6d/c.html](#)

Are Singapore Formula One Grand Prix green claims glossing over huge carbon footprint?

The flood-lit F1 night race says it is going green by encouraging the use of public transport, digitising tickets and using LED lights. Critics say communications to promote these measures overlook the carbon cost of a sport that consumes as much energy as 30,000 homes in a year.



Source: Eco-Business - <https://www.eco-business.com/news/are-singapore-formula-one-grand-prix-green-claims-glossing-over-huge-carbon-footprint/>

Gridlocked and flood-prone, Vietnam's biggest city struggles to keep pace with its own breakneck growth

Ho Chi Minh City need decisive action fast to overcome crowding and climate challenges and secure its 10 million residents' future quality of life. Some bold ideas have been put forward, but funding woes and infrastructure paralysis mean its problems could turn into a drag on the whole economy.

Source: South China Morning Post - <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3194366/gridlocked-and-flood-prone-vietnams-biggest-city-struggles-keep>



Carbon-negative Bhutan offers lessons on fighting climate change

As many countries set goals to achieve carbon-zero growth years from now, tiny Bhutan nestled between India and China in the Himalayan mountains has reached the target of carbon negative already – absorbing more carbon than it emits.

Source: Nikkei Asia (Japan) - <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Environment/Climate-Change/Carbon-negative-Bhutan-offers-lessons-on-fighting-climate-change>



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2021-22 Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World

We live in a world of worry. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, having driven reversals in human development in almost every country, continues to spin off variants unpredictably. War in Ukraine and elsewhere has created more human suffering. Record-breaking temperatures, fires, storms and floods sound the alarm of planetary systems increasingly out of whack. Together, they are fuelling a cost-of-living crisis felt around the world, painting a picture of uncertain times and unsettled lives.

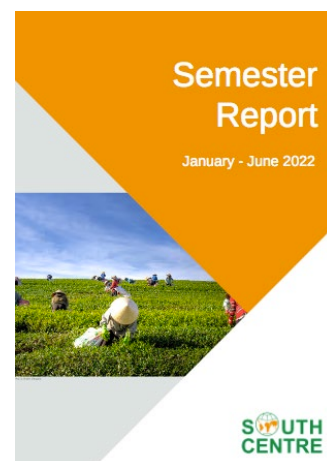
Uncertainty is not new, but its dimensions are taking ominous new forms today. A new “uncertainty complex” is emerging, never before seen in human history. Constituting it are three volatile and interacting strands: the destabilizing planetary pressures and inequalities of the Anthropocene, the pursuit of sweeping societal transformations to ease those pressures and the widespread and intensifying polarization.

For more information: <https://www.undp.org/egypt/publications/human-development-report-2021-22-uncertain-times-unsettled-lives-shaping-our-future-transforming-world>

South Centre Semester Report, January – June 2022

While global inequality continues to grow, developing and least developed countries face multiple crises in the context of a weak recovery from COVID-19, massive outflows of capital, decline of Official Development Assistance, monetary policy tightening, increase in food and energy prices and the impact of climate change. This document presents a brief analysis of the situation faced by South Centre’s members and other developing and least developed countries and provides a summary of the activities undertaken by the Centre in the period January – June 2022

Report Download: https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/South-Centre-First-Semester-Report-2022_FINAL_red.pdf



The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 provides a global overview of progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, using the latest available data and estimates. It tracks the global and regional progress towards the 17 Goals with in-depth analyses of selected indicators for each Goal. According to the Report, cascading and interlinked crises are putting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in grave danger, along with humanity’s very own survival.

Download Report - <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>



Exhibition Educates Youth on Dangers of Nuclear Weapons



A young Kazakh viewing the exhibits. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

By Kalinga Seneviratne

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan — An exhibition that opened at Keruen Mall, an upmarket shopping centre here on September 16 and continues until the end of the month, uses a novel method to reach out to young people with the message of the dangers of nuclear weapons.

The exhibition depicts over 70 years of nuclear history from the Hiroshima explosion through to today, using photographs, illustrations, and graphs that show the devastating effects of nuclear weaponry on

communities.

Soka Gakkai international (SGI), a Japanese Buddhist non-governmental organization (NGO) that promotes peace, culture, and education, organized the exhibition along with the Nobel laureate International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and local NGO, the Kazakh Center for International Security and Policy.

The exhibition was first shown in Hiroshima, Japan in 2012 and has since been travelled to more than 90 cities in 21 countries around the globe.

“Kazakhstan was home to nuclear test sites, including the Semipalatinsk Test Site under the Soviet Union, and it is a country of many people who suffered greatly from consequences of nuclear weapon tests,” SGI Director General for Peace and Global Issues Hirotsugu Terasaki told IDN.

“In view of the situation surrounding nuclear weapons today, many people in Kazakhstan share the same strong desire for nuclear disarmament like many of Japanese people who experienced atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

In a welcoming speech at the opening ceremony, Deputy Director of the Department for International Security of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Arman Baisuanov, said Kazakhstan had suffered the impact of some 450 nuclear tests on its soil during the Soviet era between 1949 to 1989. These tests were conducted underground and in the air, affecting about 1.5 million people.

“A world free of nuclear weapons is central to our foreign policy,” he said, pointing out that in 2019 Kazakhstan had ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. “Kazakhstan is leading a global coalition to build a movement to ban nuclear weapons.”

Presented on some 20 panels with colourful, eye-catching graphics, under the theme ‘*Everything You Treasure – For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons*’, the exhibition is designed to educate the youth in particular to get them out of their apathy on the issue. The exhibition panels answer questions on whether nuclear weapons really protect what we hold dear, what are the problems

caused by nuclear weapons—humanitarian, environmental, medical, and economic—as well as what we want our future to be.

“Younger Kazakhstanis haven’t experienced these nuclear testing sites. We are learning from this type of exhibition that nuclear testing and nuclear weapons are not tolerable,” Madiyar Aiyyp, a young Kazakhstani who attended the opening ceremony, told IDN. “We should all work together as a joint human population so that we can resolve any problems without going through to nuke each other.”

A special guest at the opening was Bolatbek Baltabek, a 63-year-old second-generation victim of nuclear tests who is now an international anti-nuclear movement activist. He spoke about the tragic consequences the nuclear tests had on him and his family.



Bolatbek Baltabek speaking at the launch of the exhibition. Photo: Katsuhiko Asagiri

Mr Baltabek was a child when the Soviet Union tested the atomic bomb near his home village Sarzhal in eastern Kazakhstan, in what came to be known as Semey polygon. He related that during the summer, his father and mother lived in one room, and the rest of the rooms were occupied by Soviet military personnel who came to conduct the nuclear tests.

“When we were children, when the helicopters came, we used to run happily saying ‘now there will be a test’. At that time, we did not know the tests were dangerous,” Mr Baltabek said.

“Later, when we grew up, the death of our friends, relatives and acquaintances from unknown diseases used to instil fear in our childhood hearts. If we asked our elders, they will simply say ‘disease of the landfill’, and we could understand looking at their sad eyes that this topic should not be discussed,” he added.

Mr Baltabek narrated how the Soviet government took them in groups to the city of Semipalatinsk and conducted tests for ten days. They did not give any information on the test results, but he thinks their community became the object of an experiment. However, the government never gave any special assistance to those impacted by the testing.

“Currently, the diseases caused by the tests are beginning to be seen in our children and grandchildren, who did not see the landfill explosions,” notes Mr Baltabek, adding that his granddaughter is sick with blood disease and is now on the disability register. “I’m asking participants of this forum, including those from Japan, to help my granddaughter recover from this illness.”

Foreign policy analyst Iskander Akylybayev argued that, though the polygon was closed at the end of the Soviet Union, problems have not come to an end. The impact of nuclear tests “can be passed from one generation to another”. He added: “They are suffering from socio-economic consequences such as (contaminated) drinking water, (lack of) health facilities or have to travel to cities for treatment. So, we must put emphasis on social-economic issues as well,” he told IDN.

Mr Akylybayev feels that this exhibition needs to be taken across the country because “we are in a dangerous time where the Cold War thinking is coming back and the chance of using nuclear weapons is on the agenda as well. It is very important to learn from past mistakes”.

“The exhibition has taken place in more than 20 countries around the world, and we would like to continue to hold it in other regions translating (the panels) in many languages,” Mr Terasaki said. “This exhibition is different from ordinary exhibitions calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The key point is that the exhibition offers various perspectives on nuclear weapons.”

Japanese language teacher Shigenobu Masujima, who has lived in Kazakhstan for 15 years, argued that since both Japan and Kazakhstan have experienced the horrors of nuclear weapons, “unless we as the atom-bombed nations, convey the horror of nuclear weapons to the world, people will not understand. Therefore, we must take the initiative in this regard”.

“Many people do not have a clear image of nuclear weapons because they do not exist close to us,” noted Mr Terasaki. “For this reason, the issue of nuclear weapons tends to be hidden from our daily lives. We try to show our audience that nuclear weapons are not something irrelevant to us, but rather they deeply influence our lives and ways of living.” [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 25 September 2022]



Pictures from the launch of the exhibition. Photos: Kalinga Seneviratne

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Edited by Dr Kalinga Seneviratne Email: kalingasen@gmail.com