Regarding Resolution 78.241

In response to the request from Ms. Nakamitsu for comment regarding Resolution 78/241 “Lethal autonomous weapons systems”, I offer this opinion based on working from 2002 to 2013 for the city of Hiroshima and Mayors for Peace, the campaigning NGO of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For six years I was chairman of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, Hiroshima’s organization managing peace programs and international relations.

What the UN decides regarding autonomous weapons systems is irrelevant. As with nuclear weapons, the problem is not the weapons. The problem is the mindset, the attitudes and thinking behind the weapons. The UN was created to prevent war. It has been unable to do that for all the reasons you know much better than I. However, we are entering an extremely dangerous, possibly lethal time in human history.

White people in the Global North have been dominating the Earth and its resources for five hundred years. Now, the US and Europe are rapidly weakening while China and Asia, including Russia, are growing stronger. Whether the society comprises chickens, chimpanzees, or humans, shifts in dominance hierarchies usually involve violence.

Right now, we are witnessing many of the phenomena that preceded World Wars One and Two. The tensions are greatly intensified by a wide array of completely catastrophic weapon systems, by dwindling resources, by escalating independence movements, and by existential threats to Earth’s ability to sustain us.

In this context, the violent competition among the US, Europe, China, Russia, Asia, etc. is the problem. Who wins is irrelevant. As long as the competition remains violent and potentially terminal, humanity will remain utterly unable to respond to any of the global threats we face. The only competition that can possibly affect the outcome, that is, enhance the chances of Homo sapiens surviving into the next century, is the competition between war and peace.

The UN’s mandate is to resolve all conflict through dialogue, discussion, negotiation, treaties, and the pursuit of solutions that are based on truth and that benefit and satisfy all parties. From this point of view, the UN should not trouble itself with the details of weapons or weapon systems. The UN should focus intently and with determination on the propensity of certain UN members to ignore the fundamental meaning, purpose, and function of the UN. The UN needs to stand up for the peaceful resolution of conflict. The UN also needs to stand up for international law, expressing intense criticism and using every tool at its disposal to fight rogue nations and other lawless elements, including members of the Security Council.

Humanity desperately needs the UN to prevent war. That means we need the UN to stand up for international law and for itself as the proper, international forum for the resolution of ALL international conflict. War and violence of any sort for any reason are beyond the pale, and any people, nation, or organization that resorts to violence is a rogue committing a
crime against humanity. Until the UN accepts its duty to confront and forcefully oppose inter- or intra-state violence, the UN and international law itself amount to lipstick on a pig.

The elimination of war is the goal, but nuclear weapons are the place to start. No one wants a nuclear war. The case against nuclear weapons is extremely easy to make, and nuclear weapons are the easiest global problem we face. Nine countries could solve this problem in less than a month if they put their minds to it. A campaign against nuclear weapons would be relatively easy, and when humanity decides to set aside its doomsday machines, it will be taking a giant step toward cooperating for survival. Once humanity decides to cooperate for survival, peace culture is just around the corner. The keys are: 1) identify the selfish, violent enemies of humanity who refuse to abide by Article VI of the NPT and 2) spend millions of dollars informing the global public exactly who is stealing what from them, what the culture of perpetual war is doing to them, what the constant threat of annihilation is doing to them, and what nuclear weapons will actually do to them if anyone is stupid enough to start a nuclear war.

Unfortunately, this process will require the UN to identify and defeat its most powerful enemies, and doing that will be the fight of the century. As evidenced by the recent withdrawal of funding from UNRWA, a genuine effort to eliminate nuclear weapons will put the very existence of the UN at risk. This battle can only be won by communicating loudly and effectively through the media to the global public, and that will require millions of dollars spent year after year on telling the people the truth with the expectation that they will choose universal health and wellbeing over nuclear war and total environmental collapse. The battle will be dangerous and difficult. The UN might go bankrupt and fail for lack of funding, but if humanity fails to abandon violence as a legitimate method of conflict resolution, our species will soon be extinct.

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