

UPF International: Upholding the Peace Imperative amid Rising Nuclear Rhetoric

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As the Universal Peace Federation marks the 50th day of its 100-Day Campaign for Peace leading to the UN International Day of Peace on September 21, we urgently highlight escalating nuclear threats. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned, "Humanity is on a knife's edge ... nuclear blackmail has returned," drawing us closer to humanitarian catastrophe. Inspired by UPF's co-founders, Dr. Hak Ja Han and the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, we advocate for peace through dialogue, mutual respect, and the vision of One Family Under God.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, resolved through communications between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, including mutual concessions - the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in exchange for the dismantling of U.S. missiles in Turkey - serves as a crucial lesson in diplomatic courage. Such dialogue remains humanity's essential lifeline amid modern conflicts complicated by disinformation and multi-actor proliferation.

Today's nuclear threats are no longer theoretical but manifest in real public dynamics. North Korea's ICBM tests continue to pose serious challenges to regional stability. Iran's uranium enrichment further highlights the pressing need for renewed dialogue and robust international safeguards. In parallel, several nuclear-armed powers have increasingly employed nuclear rhetoric in public discourse, treating strategic deterrence not as a last resort but as a routine instrument of statecraft. This shift risks eroding the nuclear taboo, legitimizing mass destruction as a policy tool, and encouraging imitation by aspiring nuclear states or non-state actors.

Emerging technologies also introduce new dangers. Artificial intelligence in nuclear command systems and the threat of cyberattacks on early warning infrastructure raise the risk of miscalculation and false

alerts, undermining the very logic of deterrence.

The global framework for nuclear governance, particularly the NPT and IAEA safeguards, has contributed significantly to containment and verification. Yet critical gaps remain. The continued maintenance of substantial arsenals by a handful of nations only underscores the urgency of revitalized commitments. In this context, Universal Peace Federation encourages nuclear-armed states to observe the disarmament agenda.

Global military annual spending has exceeded US\$2 trillion. These resources could instead address hunger, climate change, and education gaps. The continued modernization of nuclear weapons diverts essential funds from the global development agenda and undermines collective human security.

The Bangkok Treaty (1995), which created Southeast Asia's nuclear-free zone and helped ease tensions among ASEAN states, offers a viable model for Northeast Asia. Such regional agreements, when complemented by informal "track-two" diplomacy among scholars, NGOs, and former officials, can foster trust and reduce risk.

The example of South Africa - which developed and then voluntarily dismantled its nuclear arsenal - demonstrates that moral leadership and national security can coexist. Similarly, Kazakhstan inherited the world's fourth-largest nuclear arsenal after the Soviet collapse. By choosing to renounce it entirely, it became a vocal proponent of non-proliferation.

Progress must come from renewed multilateralism, pragmatic diplomacy, and the principle of living for the sake of others. As Dr. Hak Ja Han teaches, "Peace begins in the heart, but it must manifest through principled action across borders." This principle remains a compass for all those seeking reconciliation above retaliation.

Through its Northeast Asia Peace Initiative (NEAPI), UPF has long championed pragmatic peacebuilding and the principle of the brotherhood of nations. Joint cultural initiatives, such as the 2018 Olympic cooperation between North and South Korea, serve as blueprints for sustained engagement. However, these gains are fragile and must be reinforced with diplomatic and humanitarian continuity.

Peace education remains key. Empowering young people with the skills, ethics, and intercultural understanding to reject fear-based politics is essential to transforming the nuclear paradigm for future generations.

At the moral level, faith-based organizations play an indispensable role. In March 2025, during the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) conference, more than 100 faith-based groups, including the World Council of Churches, issued a Joint Interfaith Statement. It affirmed the moral imperative to eliminate nuclear weapons as incompatible with the sanctity of Creation and human dignity. The Universal Peace Federation stands with this voice of conscience. As Dr. Sun Myung Moon urged, peace comes not through dominance, but through mutual sacrifice and understanding.

We therefore call for decisive action: all nuclear-armed states, particularly permanent UN Security Council members, should refrain from provocative rhetoric and recommit to dialogue-based deterrence policies rooted in transparency and trust.

Let us commit to a future rooted in empathy, inclusion, and shared responsibility. Nuclear weapons do not protect our humanity. They threaten it. Only by standing together, across nations and faiths, can we defuse the logic of fear and replace it with the power of cooperation. As history shows, disarmament is not only possible, it is a choice that leaders can make today, for a safer tomorrow. Citizens, educators, faith leaders, and civil society must all become stewards of peace. The imperative to end the nuclear age belongs to each of us.