Address by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
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2020 Okinawa Memorial Service for All War Dead

23 June 2020
Video message from
United Nations Headquarters, New York
On the occasion of the 2020 Okinawa Memorial Day Service, it is my great honour to pay tribute to all victims of the Battle of Okinawa and to express heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

During the Second World War, a fierce ground battle called the “typhoon of steel” took place here in Okinawa. Landscapes and heritage sites were destroyed without any regard to their scenic beauty or their incalculable cultural and historical value. Over 200,000 people, both Japanese and Allied forces, lost their precious lives. I remember the deep sorrow I felt when I visited this site with my family and saw the individual names inscribed on the “Cornerstone of Peace”, imagining their lives and deaths.

On 31 October of last year, I happened to be in Tokyo on business. I was left speechless and shed tears at the news of the fire engulfing the Shurijo Castle and its seiden (main building), which was completely destroyed. I applaud the passion and efforts of the people of Okinawa for rebuilding the heart and soul of Okinawa, Shurijo Castle, and I sincerely pray for its earliest reconstruction.

On 26 June 1945, soon after the end of the Battle of Okinawa, representatives of 50 countries who gathered in San Francisco signed the Charter of the United Nations to establish the United Nations as the foundation for post-war international peace. As stated in the preamble of the Charter, the United Nations was founded to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.” For the past 75 years, the United Nations has steadfastly worked for the maintenance of world peace and prosperity as the centre of international cooperation.

However, 75 years after the Battle of Okinawa, tensions among major powers are increasing. The international security environment has been deteriorating. Some have described what we are witnessing as the New Cold War. Though increased multilateral cooperation is required to address global issues such as the coronavirus crisis, climate change and sustainable development, international relations have become multi-polar and more complex, and there is a tendency of diminishing regard for international norms and frameworks. Furthermore, trust between countries has been weakening, and the international community is being shaken by the rising tide of unilateralism.
In the current situation, I hear some say now is not the time to pursue disarmament. We believe that disarmament is necessary precisely because we find ourselves in this deteriorated international security environment, not seen since the days of the Cold War. Disarmament builds confidence among States and is an important tool to maintain predictable and stable international relations based on dialogue, negotiations and rules.

This year marks an important milestone, the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the founding of the United Nations. In order to never repeat the unimaginable suffering that the victims of the Battle of Okinawa experienced, the international community must unite and work on maintaining international peace and security. Secretary-General Guterres and the staff of the United Nations are committed to this cause and to working with you.

I would like to especially call on today’s youth to actively participate in this effort for peace. They are the ultimate force that will shoulder the future of the Earth and bring about change. The people of Okinawa have overcome the scourge of the Battle of Okinawa and devoted their lives to post-war reconstruction and the realization of peace. Passing their passion and accomplishments to the younger generation would be an important way to commemorate all those who lost their lives on this land.

In closing, I wish peaceful rest for all those souls whose lives were lost and peace for the bereaved families.