

Planting ceremony for Hiroshima survivor Ginkgo biloba
2nd generation sapling
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Speech by Mr. Nikhil Seth, UNITAR Executive Director

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon,
Excellencies,
Ambassador Ihara,
Mayor Durnez, Mayor of Ypres and Representative of the Mayors for Peace,
Director-General Micheal Møller,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning and a warm welcome to you all on this special occasion. Today we gather to witness the planting of this young Ginkgo biloba sapling, descendent of a Hiroshima A-bombed survivor tree, by the UN SG Ban Ki-moon. This is a truly historical moment on many fronts.

The Ginkgo biloba is a native of China, and one of the most ancient tree species on the planet. It can grow up to 50 meters, can live for centuries, and is particularly resistant to pollution, disease and fire. The strength and resilience explains why some old Ginkgo trees survived the nuclear aftermath of August 6, 1945 in Hiroshima. This particular sapling is a direct descendent of one of the oldest living trees in Hiroshima's historical Shukkein Gardens, and has reached us courtesy of the city of Lucerne, one of many nurturing sites around the world.

The movement to spread the seeds and saplings of Hiroshima's survivor trees worldwide, now in some 30 countries, was started in 2011 with the vision of the Green Legacy Hiroshima Initiative and its co-founders Nassrine Azimi and Tomoko Watanabe, of UNITAR Hiroshima Office and ANT-Hiroshima, respectively. GLH members are represented here today by master-gardener Mr. Chikara Horiguchi and

I thank him and his counterparts and gardeners in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and around the world, for their dedication. Theirs has been a true labour of selfless work to spread the message of peace. Thanks to the unstinting involvement of Hiroshima City and its Mayor, the movement has also been endorsed by Mayors for Peace, bringing together the political and moral power of more than 7000 cities worldwide. I take this opportunity to thank Mayor Durnez, Mayor of Ypres and Vice-President of Mayors for Peace, for being with us here today and am grateful also for the support of the Government of Japan and Hiroshima Prefecture.

UNITAR is proud to have worked closely with the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, the United Nations Office at Geneva, representatives of the Mayors for Peace, ANT-Hiroshima and Green Legacy Hiroshima.

It means a lot to international Geneva, my colleagues and I, that the Secretary General of the United Nations has gracefully accepted to plant this tree on the grounds of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Secretary General Ban has worked relentlessly over the last ten years to strengthen all three pillars of the United Nations – especially the one of peace and security, and the building of peaceful and just societies. We could not have hoped for someone more emblematic at the planting ceremony.

It is UNITAR's hope that this small sapling will grow to be a strong, beautiful reminder of our aspirations for peace. The cities of peace and resilience, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are sending their message to the world through another city which has championed peace, human rights and sustainable development – Geneva. May the cautionary message reach and reverberate in the world and especially to those in Geneva who work in the areas of disarmament.

I thank you for your attention.