We are here, on hallowed ground, to see, feel, absorb and reflect. I am honored to be the first United Nations Secretary-General to take part in this Peace Memorial Ceremony. And I am deeply moved. When the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I was one year old. Only later in life could I begin to understand the full dimension of all that happened here.

As a boy, I lived through the Korean War. One of my earliest memories is marching along a muddy road into the mountains, my village burning behind me. All those lives lost, families destroyed — so much sadness. Ever since, I have devoted my life to peace. It has brought me here today. We gather to pay our solemn respects to those who perished 65 years ago, and to the many more whose lives forever changed.

Life is short, but memory is long. For many of you, that day endures, vivid as the white light that seared the sky, as dark as the black rains that followed. To you, I offer a message of hope: A more peaceful world can be ours. You are helping to make it happen: you, the survivors, who inspired us with your courage; you, the next generations, striving for a better day. Together, you have made Hiroshima an epicenter of peace. Together, we are on a journey from ground zero to Global Zero — a world free of weapons of mass destruction. That is the only sane path to a safer world. For as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will live under a nuclear shadow. And that is why I have made nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation a top priority and put forward a five-point plan.

Our moment has come. Everywhere, we find new friends and allies. We see new leadership from the most powerful nations. We see new engagement in the UN Security Council. We see new energy from civil society. Russia and the US have a new START treaty. We made important progress at the nuclear summit in Washington, which we will build upon in Korea in 2012.

We must keep the momentum. In September I will convene a conference on disarmament in New York. We will push for negotiations towards nuclear disarmament: a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, a fissile material cut-off treaty, disarmament education in our schools — including translating the testimonies of the survivors into the world’s major languages. We must teach an elemental truth: that status and prestige belong not to those who possess nuclear weapons, but those who reject them.

Sixty-five years ago, the fires of hell descended upon this place. Today, one fire burns here in this Peace Memorial Park. That is the flame of peace, a flame that will remain lit until nuclear weapons are no more. Together, let us work for that day — in our lifetime, in the lifetime of the survivors.

Together, let us put out the last fire of Hiroshima. Let us replace that flame with the light of hope. Let us realize our dream of a world free of nuclear weapons so that our children and all succeeding generations can live in freedom, security and peace.