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Hibakusha of Hiroshima

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My name is Sakuma Kunihiro and I am from Hiroshima. Already 71 years have passed since the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Since I was only 9 months old then, I heard from my mother what happened at that time as I grew up.

My house was located at 3 km west of the blast center. On the morning of August 6, I was asleep on the porch facing the opposite side of the blast center. My mother was doing laundry inside the house. Suddenly, a bright flash ran. Thinking that a bomb might have exploded nearby, she held me on her back and fled to an emergency shelter in the mountain behind our house. On the way, we got wet in the "Black Rain." At the shelter, many people were lying on the ground with their heads, arms and legs severely injured. After a while, we came back home to find that windows were all blown away and scattered, walls collapsed and pillars tilting. But we managed to keep living in our house. Due to the combined effects of the blast, heat rays and radiation, with a single atomic bomb, about 140,000 people were killed by the end of 1945 in Hiroshima. In Nagasaki, some 70,000 perished. Compared to those who had lost their families and houses, the damage of my family was relatively small.

I was rather far away from the blast center, so I never thought I was affected by radiation. But when I was 10 - 11 years old (1954 - 1955), I could not go to school for 2 months. I was suffering from liver and kidney dysfunction, feeling languid and having no appetite. I was afraid that I might die. My parents wondered why a small child like me suffered from such diseases as usually common among adults. Soon after exposed to the A-bomb, my mother started to feel ill, but she took great care of me who was suffering from malnutrition. She was diagnosed as having a breast cancer in 1963 and had her entire breast removed by operation. Even after that, she continued to get diseases with unknown cause and was repeatedly hospitalized. She passed away in 1988 at age 87.

It was after I read a book titled "Black Rain" in 1966 that I began to think that it may be this "Black Rain" that caused my mother's breast cancer and my diseases. Later in 2011, it was confirmed by the data held by the Radiation Effects Research Foundation that I had been exposed to the Black Rain. The RERF conducted a survey in the 1950s in which my mother's name was recorded among 13,000 people who answered "yes" to the question, "Have you gotten wet with the Black Rain?" It was a great shock

for me and for the first time it came home to me that I myself had been a Hibakusha. The "Black Rain" comes from the atomic cloud created by the A-bomb explosion. When the cloud reaches to the lower layer of stratosphere by rising current, it spreads wide. Radioactive dust and soot is also curled up and mixed with water drops in the air, producing the "Black Rain." Thus, radioactive fallout within this rain is carried extensively, affecting a broad area.

A similar situation was created again in Japan by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident on March 11, 2011. Victims of radiation were sadly created again. I am concerned about how the effect of internal exposure to low-level radiation will appear among the people in the future, as nuclear power plant use and emit the same radioactive materials as A-bombs.

Currently, I am engaged in consultation activities for the A-bomb survivors as a member of the Hiroshima Council of A-bomb Sufferers. People come to consult us to find out if they had been affected by the A-bomb, or if their illnesses were caused by the A-bomb radiation. Among them are those who are dying of cancer, leukemia or myocardial infarction or undergoing medical treatment, or those who are worried about possible onset of such conditions. Hibakusha suffer from physical and psychological pain and are worried about possible genetic effects on the second and third generations. What happened 71 years ago is not a history. When I see the A-bomb survivors still dying and suffering from the effects of the A-bomb, I believe they are absolutely evil weapons that belong to the devil. The inhumane nature of nuclear weapons is clear to everyone.

We believe that the surest way to prevent another use of nuclear weapons anywhere on earth is their prohibition and abolition. Earnestly desiring the elimination of nuclear weapons without delay, we the Hibakusha have been working on the "International Signature Campaign in Support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons," which we launched in spring this year. We call for the support to this international signature campaign especially among the people of the nuclear weapon states and those under their nuclear umbrella. We are aiming to get hundreds of millions of signatures from people of the world. Facing the reality that nearly 15,000 nuclear weapons still exist, together with the people around the world, we will continue to appeal to the world, "Humans cannot coexist with nuclear weapons."

No more Hiroshimas! No more Nagasakis! No more Hibakusha! Thank you.

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