

IPB World Congress: Disarm! For a Climate of Peace

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“Creating the Nuclear Weapons-Free World: Conference within the Congress”

Humanitarian Consequences of the Atomic Bombings:

What Did They Do to the Humans?

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I want to thank the chair and the participants for this opportunity to speak before you as a Hibakusha, an A-bomb survivor.

I am one of those who survived the atomic bombing on Nagasaki 71 years ago. Now I serve as secretary general of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo), the only national organization of the A-bomb survivors. I want to talk to you about catastrophic and inhumane effects of the use of nuclear weapons, based on my own experience.

I was at age 13, on that day. I was at home, about 3.2 kilometers from where the bomb exploded. Miraculously I managed to survive without having any major injuries.

Three days later, I entered the ground zero area to look for my relatives. I walked around and found the charred bodies of my aunt and cousin lying in the cinders of what used to be their house. My grandfather, who used to live some 700-meters from the blast center, was found there half-dead. His burns were so hideous and penetrated to the bone. In the field beside him, I had to cremate the body of another aunt who had survived for three days after the bombing. In her ashes, I saw her in lifetime. Tears welled up and I broke down crying. My uncle, who seemed with no external injuries and went away to ask for help, later developed a high fever and died in agony within 10 days.

Altogether, five of my family members were brutally killed by the atomic bomb, all at once. Even after 71 years, the dreadful scenes I witnessed in the ground zero area -- of the untold number of corpses left unattended even 3 days after the explosion, or people who narrowly survived and suffering from heavy burns and injuries but with no help given -- still stay vividly in my memory.

On August 6 and 9, 1945, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were attacked with atomic bombs. The nuclear fission energy released from these bombs completely destroyed the two cities. Mighty blasts, heat rays and radiation mercilessly assaulted all the citizens and children of the cities, where they had lived, worked, studied or played.

They suffered serious burns from heat rays, were thrown onto the ground by the blast, burned to death while buried under the fallen houses, or died in agony due to the

destruction of their cells by intense radiation. Tens of thousands of people perished by the end of the day.

In those days no one knew about the effects of radiation emitted from the atomic bombs or about the residual radiation from fallouts. Those who narrowly survived with only slight injuries on that day started to suffer from high fever and died one after another.

After the bombing many people entered the city for rescue work or in search of their relatives. They also began to develop acute radiation symptoms such as loss of hair, bleeding from various parts of body or high fever, and fell into critical condition or died.

It is estimated that by the end of 1945, about 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki died. But you must not pay attention to the number of the deaths only. Each person of this number had hope and dignity to live one's life, but it was denied cruelly at an instance.

The atomic bombs did not allow the Hibakusha to live a humanly life or to die humanly death.

The A-bomb radiation continued to destroy cells, gene information and immune system of the survivors, and kept them in constant sufferings with various aftereffects. They suffered different kinds of cancers, including leukemia. Recently it was found that radiation has effects to cause some non-cancer diseases as well. The Hibakusha are in constant fear of the aftereffects and possible consequences on their children and grandchildren even 71 years after that day.

Those who faced an extreme situation of life or death and those who engaged in rescue activities or collecting dead bodies have suffered from the sense of guilt for not being able to act humanly in these circumstances. In addition to the fear over the aftereffects of radiation, they continue to suffer from such trauma even now.

Thus, the atomic bomb did not allow the Hibakusha to live a humanly life. This phrase typically describe the inhumanity of the atomic bomb. But there are not a few Hibakusha who have squarely faced and struggled with this inhumanity, and lived their lives as humanly as possible.

The US occupation forces tried to cover up the A-bomb damage. Subsequently, even after achieving independence, the Japanese government abandoned the Hibakusha without extending any help. The request for help from Dr. Marcel Junod to the International Red Cross was neglected. Many Hibakusha who had their ties with families, neighbors and others in workplaces and schools severed by the atomic bomb, were isolated in the society.

It was in 1957, as late as 12 years after the atomic bombing that the government of Japan finally started taking some measures to provide medical relief to the survivors. By then, not a few Hibakusha had died in difficult living conditions with illnesses, without receiving proper medical care or relief measures. The state of inhumanity caused during the war remained in Japan for some time after the war ended.

In March 1954, the U.S. hydrogen bomb test conducted at Bikini Atoll, the Marshall Islands, caused widespread damage to the people in the Pacific, including the crewmembers of Japanese tuna fishing boats exposed to the fallout from the bomb. This incident triggered a massive anti-A and H-bomb movement all over Japan. Encouraged by the movement, the Hibakusha got together to establish their organization, Nihon Hidankyo, in August 1956. Since its founding, members of Hidankyo have demanded state compensation for the A-bomb damage, while calling for a swift abolition of nuclear weapons, so that no one else should experience the same suffering that they have gone through. Internationally, Hidankyo has worked tirelessly to make the truth of the inhuman A-bomb damage known to the people all over the world.

The use of nuclear weapons is an act of denying humanity. In order for the humans to survive, nuclear weapons must never be used. The “nuclear deterrence policy”, which assumes the use of nuclear weapons, is a clear violation of the morality for human community to survive.

In recent years, in the form of joint statements at the U.N. General Assembly and through the “International Conferences on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons”, overwhelming majority of the countries in the world have agreed that nuclear weapons must never be used under any circumstances, and that the only guarantee to prevent their use is their elimination. The appeals and stories of the Hibakusha are getting to have more and more weight in the international politics.

The representatives of the Hibakusha have joined in the discussion during this year in the Open-ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament, set up by the 70th UN General Assembly resolution. The Working Group announced its recommendation to the 71st session of the UN General Assembly, including the convening of a conference to negotiate legal measures for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We expect that further initiatives will soon start.

Hibakusha cannot accept the maintenance or use of nuclear weapons for the sake of “security”. We urge the nuclear-armed states and their allies to change their security policies based on nuclear deterrence, and come to the table to discuss legal measures and path to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Now that 71 years have passed, Hibakusha cannot wait any longer. In April this year, we launched the “International Appeal of the Hibakusha” calling on all State Governments to conclude a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons, and sent it out to the civil societies to peoples around the world. I am confident that this appeal will be supported by hundreds of millions of people all over the world.

In addition to giving support to this “Hibakusha Appeal” signature campaign, if citizens of all societies of the world start discussing their own security at the grass-roots level, they will spread and make many shoots come out everywhere, growing into massive

trees to cover the entire globe and yield strong power to urge nuclear-armed states and their allies to change their nuclear policies. I am sure we can create a nuclear weapon-free world without war.

There are still more than 15,000 nuclear warheads, including operationally deployed ones, on this planet. There may be many difficulties ahead of us to reach the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, but we can achieve the goal if we maintain our strong resolve for it.

As nuclear weapons are invented by humans, so it is also humans that can abolish them through their wisdom. We must make a great stride toward the abolition of nuclear weapons without delay. Now is the time.

Dear friends, let us rally our strength and wisdom and work together to achieve a nuclear weapon-free and peaceful world.

No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis.

No more Hibakusha. No more war!