75th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombings:

Deconstructing the Myths and Promoting a Nuclear Weapons-Free and Just World

July 13, 2020

**We Must Abolish Nuclear Weapons and Save Humankind**

**KIDO Sueichi, Secretary General**

**Japan Confederation of A-and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations**

**(Nihon Hidankyo)**

First of all, I would like to express my deep respect to our friends in the U.S. peace movement for organizing this event, despite the grave pandemic situation here. I feel privileged to speak to you today.

I am KIDO Sueichi, a Hibakusha of Nagasaki and am working as Secretary General of Nihon Hidankyo. I was 5 years old on August 9, 1945.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary, I want to mourn the deaths from the atomic bombing and pay respect to our forerunners who have dedicated their lives to creating a nuclear weapon-free and just world. Let me share with you the aspirations of the Hibakusha and Nihon Hidankyo’s movement.

**I. My experience on August 9 and 10, 1945**

1) The moment of the bomb explosion

I was with my mother and other women in the neighborhood in front of my house, located at 2 kilometers from what would be Ground Zero. I heard a buzz of an airplane. As soon as I looked up towards the vanishing sound, I saw a flash, and felt the force of the explosion. I was blown by the blast some 20 meters away and lost consciousness.

My mother carried me into an air raid shelter. She had burns all over her face and on the chest. Strangely I do not remember at all how she looked like at that time.

2) Inside the air raid shelter

The shelter was a cave dug into the hillside. Water was dripping from the ceiling. The shelter was filled with injured people and their groaning. Later on that day, we were reunited with my father and elder sister in the shelter.

3) The A-bomb hell witnessed on the next day

On the next day, my mother was laid on a door panel and I was put in a big basket. My family were evacuated to a suburban area called Michino-o.

On our way there, I saw no remnants of the city, not even the debris of destroyed or burnt houses. The entire city looked burnt-black. As we approached Ground Zero area, I saw many dead bodies scattered on the street and in the river, and hordes of victims were wandering around, asking for water.

My elder sister told me that at every step she made to pass by such people, she apologized to them in her heart, murmuring, “I’m sorry... so sorry”.

The world created by the atomic bomb was beyond anyone’s imagination and should never be repeated. It was a hell on earth, total annihilation of humanity.

4) What the Atomic Bombing Did

Those atomic bombs turned Hiroshima and Nagasaki into dead cities: heaps of burnt bodies inflamed and swollen; bodies with eyeballs protruding and burst belies; burnt-out street cars with their passengers; people trapped and incinerated under collapsed buildings; lines of ghost-like figures with skin hanging down in strips. It was a sight so horrible as never to be imagined in this world.

We could save neither children nor parents, nor even give water to the people in the throes of death. We can never forget the bitterness and frustration of not being able to help them.

People who barely survived the bombing, and those who entered the city to search for relatives or help victims were also struck down by radiation and died after losing their hair and bleeding. (from “No More Hibakusha – Atomic Bomb Victims Demand”)

**II. Life and Death of the Hibakusha for 75 Years**

**1. Forced into silence and abandoned for the first 12 years**

The U.S. occupation forces banned all press reports about the A-bombings, suppressed the speeches and publication about the Hibakusha, and even restricted the research and studies by medical or other experts.

The Japanese Government ended the application of the wartime disaster protection law to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in October 1945 and closed all emergency relief stations. The Hibakusha were abandoned in the burnt ruins without any official help. For the next 12 years, when relief measures were most needed for the Hibakusha, the government did nothing. It simply ignored and abandoned them.

**2. Sixty-four-year history of Nihon Hidankyo**

1) Founding of Nihon Hidankyo (The Japan Confederation of A-and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations)

The damage caused by the Bikini hydrogen bomb test in 1954 brought the horror of the atomic bombs to the minds of the Japanese people. The movement demanding their ban quickly gathered momentum with the massive signature campaign, and the attention of the people again turned to the Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In 1955, the first World Conference against A and H Bombs was held in Hiroshima, marking the 10th anniversary of the atomic bombing. From the podium, the representative of the Hibakusha said, “For the last 10 years, not a day has passed without feeling pain and suffering… Had there not been the war or the atomic bombing, I would not have been in such a miserable state… I ask all of you who have gathered here today to help ensure that no one would ever experience the suffering as we had…please.” This was the starting point of Hibakusha’s demands: “No more Hibakusha”, “Prevent nuclear war, abolish nuclear weapons” and “Achieve State compensation for the A-bomb damage”.

On August 10, 1956, Nihon Hidankyo was founded as the first national organization of the Hibakusha. The “Message to the World”, Hidankyo’s founding declaration says, “We have acquired this courage to stand up, thanks to the World Conference of last August... But our unending talks of sorrow and anger, of torture and distress accumulated deep in our hearts were not for getting consolation or relief for the time being. They had the purpose of setting ourselves up, holding hands in hands, resolutely. We would appeal to the world for what we must, would demand what we need from the State, arouse ourselves and save ourselves -- these talks provided the occasion to consider the actions we should take… Thus, we have reassured our will to save humanity from its crisis through the lessons learned from our experiences, while at the same time saving ourselves.” (from the “Message to the World”)

2) International activities of Nihon Hidankyo (from the 1950s through 1990s)

With the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, Nihon Hidankyo has engaged in international activities since the very beginning. We have sent delegations overseas, including sending the major national delegations to the U.N. three times to propose to the U.N. a draft treaty banning the use of nuclear weapons. In 1977, we jointly organized the International NGO Symposium on the Damage and After-effects of the Atomic Bombings to fully analyze the damage caused by the A-bombs. We took part in the three Special Sessions of the U.N. General Assembly on Disarmament (SSD-I, II and III), and our representative made a speech at each time. Further, we have sent delegations to the 5 nuclear-armed states to protest against their nuclear tests and to demand that they end. When Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev had their summit meetings, we urged them to meet our delegation. We issued the pamphlet “HIBAKUSHA”, which reached the people in 120 countries.

Together with the IPB (International Peace Bureau), IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War) and IALANA (International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms), we campaigned to urge the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to give an advisory opinion on the illegality of the atomic bombing. As a result, in 1996, the ICJ rendered an advisory opinion saying, “the use or threat of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law”.

In all of these actions, our members testified vividly about their A-bomb experiences and reported on Hibakusha surveys and activities conducted by Hidankyo. Especially important was Yamaguchi Senji’s speech at the SSD-II in 1982 which left a strong impression on many of the world’s people.

3) Beginning of the End of Nuclear Weapons – From Prohibition to the Elimination

In 2013 and 2014, three “International Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons” were held. Hibakusha’s appeals on these occasions were highly appreciated as they helped set the tone for the conferences: The time has come, and we have reached the point of no return on the path to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

In the wake of these conferences, in April 2016, we launched the “International Signature Campaign in Support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons” in the name of 9 Hibakusha representatives in different parts of the World. The campaign aimed to gather hundreds of millions of signatures across the world by 2020, the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing, to submit them to the U.N. and to achieve a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons with the voices of the global citizens.

When we started this signature campaign, we never expected that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons would come into being the next year. But the progress was made that fast.

In 2016, the U.N. Open-Ended Working Group sessions on the treaty to ban nuclear weapons were held, followed by the negotiation conferences for the treaty in 2017. Hidankyo contributed to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on July 7, 2017 by sending its delegations to all these meetings and testifying about the inhumanity of the damage from the atomic bombings. The adoption of the TPNW was a historic achievement to win the abolition of nuclear weapons, which had been regarded as the most difficult problem to solve, into reality. It marked the “beginning of the end of nuclear weapons.”

At present, we are in the midst of the struggles to save humankind from the three major crises of nuclear weapons, climate change and the corona virus pandemic. But what can save humanity are not those “My country first” politicians or states, but the joint efforts and solidarity of the world citizens who care for life and living of the people.

**III. In search of a world without nuclear weapons or wars**

1) Nuclear policy of the Japanese government

It is utterly regrettable that the government of Japan, the only country to have suffered the nuclear attacks in wartime, continues to oppose the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It promotes the policy of leaving the country’s security to the nuclear umbrella of the U.S., while refusing to provide State compensation for the A-bomb damage, despite the demand of the Hibakusha. Why? It is due to Japan’s long-standing policy of imposing the war sacrifice on its people.

According to this policy of the government, “Under the emergency of war when the survival of the State was at stake, even if the people were forced to sacrifice their lives, physical bodies or properties, they ought to endure the sacrifice equally, as it was a ‘general sacrifice’ caused by the war involving the entire country”.

Therefore, the people of Japan must endure the deaths or the life with continuing suffering and anxiety caused by the atomic bombing in wartime, as the sacrifice of war – this is the fundamental idea on which Japan’s policy has been based.

2) Hibakusha aspire for a world without nuclear weapons or wars

After WWII, the Constitution of Japan gave great hope and support to the Hibakusha to live. Especially, the Preamble confirmed the resolve of the nation to prevent another horror of war through the action of the government and it recognized that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace. And Article 9 provided that Japan would forever renounce war, maintain no war potential and deny the right of belligerency of the State.

When we say that Hibakusha demand the “State compensation for the A-bomb damage”, we want the government to acknowledge its responsibility for the past war, compensate for the war damage it caused and to establish a system to ensure this country would never again start another war. We the Hibakusha have continued to demand the “State compensation for the A-bomb damage” as the fulfilment of the obligation of the Japanese people, with whom sovereign power resides. This is stipulated in Article 12 of the Constitution, which says, “The freedoms and rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be maintained by the constant endeavor of the people”.

“Make no more Hibakusha”, “Prevent nuclear war, abolish nuclear weapons” and “Achieve state compensation for the A-bomb damage” are the unchanged aspirations of the Hibakusha.

Before concluding, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to convey our wishes to the U.S. citizens.

We the Hibakusha do not forgive the U.S. government for dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The government of the U.S. should make a formal apology for the atomic bombing without delay and it is being held accountable for starting to take action to abolish nuclear weapons.

At the same time, nuclear weapons must never be used again. Hibakusha like us should not be created anywhere in the world. We must remain the last victims of nuclear weapons.

I have spoken about my A-bomb experience in the U.S. a number of times, especially in the New York area. Many citizens listened intently to my talk and said, “I knew that my country dropped the atomic bomb, but I have never known what had really happened under the mushroom cloud”. Some would say, “Listening to your story changed my life” and “When I asked what I could do, I was told that today’s listener should become tomorrow’s speaker. I will share what I heard from you today with my families and friends.”

Whenever I receive such feedback from you, I feel happy, encouraged and energized to live on.

So friends, I thank you again for giving me this opportunity to speak before you.