

2019 World Conference against A and H Bombs
Nagasaki Rally, August 7

Tanaka Shigemitsu
Co-Chairperson, Nihon Hidankyo

Welcome to the 2019 World Conference against A and H Bombs. I bring warm greetings of solidarity to all participants from around Japan and abroad.

On August 9, 74 years ago, an atomic bomb dropped by the United States turned the city of Nagasaki into a hell on earth. People could neither die nor live as humans. The US government concealed the atomic devastation and the Japanese government left the survivors without any relief for 12 years.

On March 1st, 1954, Japan suffered nuclear weapon damage for the third time. The United States carried out a hydrogen test explosion codenamed "Operation Castle". More than 900 fishing vessels were showered with radioactive fallout. Kuboyama Aikichi, chief radio operator of the Fifth Lucky Dragon, died in September after developing liver complications. This incident gave rise to a petition campaign demanding the prohibition of hydrogen bombs. It started in Tokyo's Suginami Ward and quickly spread nationwide. In 1956, Hibakusha participating in the 2nd World Conference against A and H Bombs, amid a growing movement for relief for and solidarity with Hibakusha, pledged to each other that Hibakusha should fight to save themselves at the same time as trying to save humanity from the crisis by making use of their A-bomb experience. We then founded the Japan Confederation of A-and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, or Hidankyo, to continue to tell people about our A-bomb experience and develop the movement demanding a hibakusha relief law based on state compensation.

Ever since, we have been campaigning for the enactment of a Hibakusha aid law providing state compensation, while bringing our stories into public debate.

During the last 74 years, there have been moments of crisis, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban missile crisis. It was world public awareness about the horrific nature of atomic bombs that prevented nuclear

weapons from being used.

Unfortunately, nuclear weapons still exist, while the Hibakusha aid law that would provide state compensation is yet to be enacted.

You may be surprised to know that the Japanese government maintains that the principle regarding compensation for the damage to Hibakusha is that “damage caused by war to human lives, bodies and properties should be equally tolerated and shared by the people“ (Japanese government, November 1980).

In April 2016, we Hibakusha, in our last-ditch effort, launched an international signature campaign saying that we request all the states to conclude a treaty that prohibits and eliminates nuclear weapons so that these weapons will be abolished for good in our lifetime.

At that time, we did not even imagine that a treaty answering to our demands would be adopted within one year at the United Nations with 122 countries voting in favor.

In Nagasaki, we rushed to the A-bomb memorial raised at the hypocenter to report this news to the dead.

Today, 70 countries have signed the treaty and 24 have ratified it.

The international signature campaign by Hibakusha has spread nationwide. The liaison committee for the promotion of the signature drive has been established in many cities around the country. In Nagasaki, five Hibakusha groups asked public figures to become campaign supporters. Nagasaki Governor Nakamura Hodo, Nagasaki City Mayor Taue Tomihisa and other local personalities have agreed to work together to collect 500,000 signatures.

The government of Japan, the only A-bombed country, claims to be a bridge between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. However, it burned down the bridge by refusing to sign the TPNW and siding with the pro-nuclear camp.

Japan must take the lead in the movement towards a world without nuclear weapons by signing and ratifying the TPNW and turning Northeast Asia into a nuclear-free zone instead of relying on the US nuclear umbrella. This depends on public opinion and the popular movement. Since the end of WWII, to this day Japan has never been involved in any war. We believe this is thanks to the Constitution. The Japanese Constitution represents the silent will that those immolated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki left us. We must not allow Article 9 to be adversely amended to make the Self-Defense Forces fully-fledged armed forces and Japan a war-fighting country. Rather, we must make use of the Constitution for promoting dialogue and peace diplomacy.

The year 2020 is an important year in which we observe the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings. The NPT Review Conference is to be held also next year at the U.N. We will see whether the TPNW will go into force. We must absolutely make this year's World Conference a success if we want to be able to take up the challenge.

Let me close by reassuring you that Hibakusha will do their utmost.