

International Meeting
2019 World Conference against A and H Bombs



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What the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty is Facing

The breakup of the humanitarian code of conduct, which has been formed in the course of the development of modern civilization, began with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is what the nuclear age is about. It is also important to note that the ensuing 74 years have seen the hibakusha and international opinion rising to firmly prevent such a breakup from happening again, even amid continuing nuclear proliferation. In my report, I want to look back on what happened during the period between the atomic bombings and July 2017 to help understand the present-day situation following the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

A 10,000-page report entitled “Medical Effects of Atomic Bombs (1951)” compiled by a team led by US colonel and surgeon Ashley W. Oughterson provides a detailed and accurate record of the state of the two cities and human bodies that were destroyed by the atomic bombings. It eloquently testifies that the atomic bomb has such enormous destructive power that it cannot be explained by any previous concept of weapons.

Many years after the bombings, the hibakusha at last decided to break their silence. Hibakusha’s stories had the irresistible power to attract people. They especially touched the sensitivity of young people and made them realize that humans have within themselves something essential that should never be broken.

In 1977, at an NGO international symposium on the damage and after-effects of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima, Sir Philip Noel-Baker, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, challenged the public to choose between “life or oblivion”. He meant that humanity cannot survive unless it continues to remember the atomic bombings and gives up nuclear weapons. He was critiquing the tense structural antagonism between the atomic bomb and humanity. For the survivors, this meant that they have the important role of continuing to live, the role of passing on their memories to future generations. At the 2nd UN special session on disarmament (SSDII) in 1982, Yamaguchi Senji, a survivor of Nagasaki, took the podium and held up a photo of the injuries he sustained to his face as well as his keloids. He showed the world that he could have been on the brink of death but was alive and well on his feet. 

The hibakusha submitted a petition with three million signatures to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) asking it to decide on the illegality of nuclear weapons. The World Court in 1996 handed down its conclusion that “the use and the threat to use nuclear weapons are generally contrary to the international law”. But it abstained from deciding whether the use was also illegal in the event that the very existence of a state was at risk. This was a wall that stood before the nuclear abolition movement in the 20th century.

In 2000, at the NPT Review Conference, the nuclear weapon states agreed that there should be “an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear

arsenals” (May 15, 2000). This agreement may have been meant to allow the nuclear weapon states to retain their monopoly over nuclear weapons, but it nevertheless reflected the fundamental fate of nuclear weapons that they can only exist to be eliminated.

At the NPT Review Conference in 2010, questions were raised about the concept of “national security with nuclear weapons.” The possession of nuclear weapons supposedly to ensure national security can be the major factor for inducing nuclear terror and nuclear proliferation. “National security with nuclear weapons” is an idea that leads to imposing another Hiroshima or Nagasaki on the population of any country. This is an idea that no one can accept. The same is true of the nuclear trigger pulled by accident. This is why we have decided to stand for universal human security, which requires the elimination of nuclear weapons as the only option.

Since 2010, we have placed the task of making clear and denouncing the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons at the center of our work. The reason for this is that if we are unable to hold dear to our heart what we want to protect, no one can protect it. Equally, if we do not know about the destruction that the use of nuclear weapons can cause, no one will seek to ban such weapons.

The International Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, supported by the wisdom of people from many different sectors and at different levels, was held three times -- in Norway in March 2013, in Mexico in February 2014, and in Austria in December 2014.

The hibakusha who were exposed to high levels of radiation still have chromosome aberrations and show increased morbidity of leukemia and almost any kind of malignant tumor. In addition, it has become known that there are increasing numbers of cases of stroke, heart diseases, anomalies in the immune system, chronic kidney disease, and other non-cancer diseases (Kodama K, 2011 HICARE International symposium, concluding seminar, Sera N. et al. 2013 Radiat Res vol 179). The fact that damage from exposure to A-bomb radiation persists all through life has been shown repeatedly.

In April 2016, the hibakusha initiated in Japan and internationally a petition campaign “Hibakusha Appeal” International Signature Campaign for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. It can be described as the final chance for the hibakusha to make such a statement. An overwhelming number of UN member countries worked hard with hibakusha and civil society representatives to draft the Nuclear Weapon Prohibition Treaty together. The treaty was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on July 7, 2017.

The adoption of the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty was made possible by world opinion retaining the reasoned willingness to keep the memory of the atomic bombing alive and to remain committed to the elimination of nuclear weapons. We must keep this in mind.

Next, I would like to touch upon some recent developments facing the prohibition treaty. First, the US “Nuclear Posture Review” issued by President Trump on February 2, 2018. The review includes miniaturizing nuclear weapons to make them as usable as conventional weapons, including pre-emptive use. This aims at dodging criticism made against nuclear weapons’ capability for mass destruction. As low-yield explosion devices, small nuclear bombs are designed to be used for pinpoint strikes on an enemy’s nuclear base or nuclear facilities. But however miniaturized, they are nuclear weapons, and if used as easily as conventional weapons, the damage they bring about would be beyond our imagination.

Secondly, Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom's remarks on July 12, 2019. Her country voted in favor of the prohibition treaty but refused to sign it.

AFP reported that she will not sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons due to her concerns regarding how the prohibition treaty can be related to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. This represents a subtle reflection of the difficulties in international politics, testifying to the geopolitical issue that is currently weighing Sweden down (its relations with Russia and the NATO issue). To put it plainly, even taking this problem into account, this kind of "resistance" to the TPNW is a question that has already been resolved. As everyone knows, the NPT (which came into force in 1970) recognizes the existence of nuclear weapon states while the TPNW denies the possession of nuclear weapons. So these are two different treaties. However, both treaties, including the NPT, which obligation of the Parties to the Treaty to pursue in good faith nuclear disarmament negotiations (Article 6), are solidly set on the same trajectory, not in parallel, in the course of history and that trajectory is leading towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The TPNW should be located on the future end of a line extending from the NPT, which requires nuclear weapon states to strive for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It is not located before the NPT.

Thirdly, is the problem of the Japanese government's attitude of turning its back on the TPNW. It is expected that the Japanese government will act as a cunning resister to get in the way of the campaign to promote the ratification of the TPNW. But the way it behaves could be its biggest political Achilles tendon. Hibakusha have no reason to be intimidated or feel uncomfortable in asking the government to sign the TPNW. The prayers for peace they make on August 6 and 9 every year can be seen as the prayer for the TPNW coming into force.

We must admit that there will be many twists and turns on the way toward the entry into force of the TPNW. However, regardless of the distance the treaty should cover before taking effect, it is most alarming that we today see the naked threat of use of nuclear weapons emerging. Is there any wall that is strong enough to prevent the use of nuclear weapons other than the TPNW, which came into existence with the support of 122 countries and ratification by 23 countries, or the campaign around the world calling for the effectuation of the treaty, or the collective memory of the atomic bombing that Sir Noel-Baker emphasized? The answer is no.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has already begun to make its way.

As we prepare for the events in 2020, we must be confident about the TPNW is coming into effect soon.

Thank you for your attention.