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I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your invitation to the World Conference against A and H Bombs online.

I am a photo journalist. Do you know what that is? I guess that it may not be a familiar occupation to you.

Through photos, I engage in making known to people what is happening in Japan and the rest of the world and what problems people are suffering from.

Today is August 6. I pray that the souls of the A-bomb victims may rest in peace. As I speak, I would like to pay full attention to those who have suffered from the damage and aftereffects of the A-bombing and to those who have come through, bearing the horrific memory of that day.

I have been around Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa covering the problems of disasters, poverty and refugees. In particular, in the past few years, I have concentrated on covering conflict-affected areas in the Middle East.

In the northern part of Iraq in the Middle East, there is an autonomous region of the Kurdish minority ethnic group. In that area, there is a town called Halabja, in which there is a street called "Hiroshima Street". Did you know that? I heard that they gave that name to the street, in the hope of sending their wish for peace from Halabja to Hiroshima. Every August, they hold a commemorative prayer there, remembering the A-bomb damage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Let me speak a little more about the history of Halabja.

In 1988, the Iran-Iraq War had reached its end phase, but fighting was still fierce. Halabja, located as it is just inside the Iraq side of the border, was one of the towns on the front line of the battle. Because the Kurds are a minority ethnic group, they have been repeatedly made use of politically and treated brutally. It was a time when Iraq's President Saddam Hussein was perpetrating repeated massacres against the Kurdish people. On March 16 that year, he dropped chemical weapons on them. The small town was instantly permeated with poison gas, including sarin gas, and as many as 5000 people were killed.

As national interests were entwined in the Iran-Iraq War, the Western countries overlooked or kept silent to this massacre despite being aware that it had happened. The tragedy did not end on March 16. People of this town continue to this day to suffer from the after-effects of the

chemical weapons. In the case of marriage, they are discriminated against simply because they come from Halabja. Through interviews, I have come to feel that the damage of Halabja resembles that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: in both cases the weapons used were weapons of mass killings and the suffering continues. In Halabja I had an interview with Mr. Shaif, who is now 88 years old and lost 24 family members. He was born in 1932. It seemed that he remembered the news that atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Touching on "Hiroshima Street", he said, "As we continue to pray from Halabja towards Japan, I want people in Japan to pray for Halabja. Protecting human rights requires actions. Without them, it will be just words. Actions such as enlarging our circle of friends may lead to a world with fewer enemies."

It is not just Iraq: there are more. As you may know, war has been continuing for 9 years in Iraq's neighbor Syria. Many people I met in Syria and in other evacuated areas mentioned the names of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when they recognize me as Japanese. Some said, "Japan is great. It rebuilt a peaceful nation from the devastating destruction. We want to make Iraq such a country. We aim to be a country like Japan." I have mixed feelings whenever I hear such words. I ask myself the question, "Have we built a peace to be proud of, one that these people in Iraq or Syria or other people who are living in the midst of war or conflicts can emulate?"

Looking back, another war started in Iraq in 2003. Do you remember the reason given for that war? The US launched attacks, saying that it was intolerable for Saddam Hussein's regime to possess weapons of mass destruction. After the end of the war, however, it was found that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, making the war groundless. Of course, the war itself should have been opposed categorically. It is a tragedy that the lives of hundreds of thousands of people were claimed because of a war without any justification. In my visit to Iraq, one lady said to me, "The current disruption was brought by the Iraq war. At that time, Japan supported this US-led war. Does Japan not have a responsibility for that?"

What is now asked of our society or our country is, I think, not only Japan's attitude towards the war on Iraq. As many speakers mentioned, its attitude toward nuclear weapons is unclear. It has not joined the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), nor has it showed any sign of doing so. Without joining the treaty, can Japan say clearly "No to nuclear weapons"? Without doing so, can Japan make a compelling statement that it is "aiming for a world without nuclear weapons"? I have big doubts. What it says looks like it is spreading an illusion that the current world is in a state of peace just because nuclear weapons are not used, even though they are ready-to-use and confronting each other.

Today the Hibakusha spoke of their painful experiences of the A-bombing and many people expressed their will not to repeat such tragedies. Because Japan knows the pain of the victims, I want Japan to be a country lighting the future for the peoples of the world, not destroying it.

One day after I had conducted some horrific interviews, I said spontaneously to my friend who was living as a refugee, "War may not end as long as humankind exists." After thinking a bit, he said quietly, "That is wrong. The reason does not lie in humankind itself. Rather, it is because of human hearts that give up, saying 'that's just the way humans are'." As I said before, many people shared their pains with us. I found in that their firm will never to repeat these experiences. As my friend in Iraq said, today August 6 is the day that people should gather their will to never give up. Let us renew our commitment to say clearly, "No to nuclear weapons" in order to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.