

Special Session: “Dialogue with an MP for a Japan Joining the TPNW”

Moderator: Coming next is the special session “**Dialogue with an MP for a Japan Joining the TPNW**”. This session was originally planned to be a panel discussion among MPs who support the ratification by Japan of the TPNW. However, as it turned out, Mr. KASAI Akira (Japanese Communist Party (JCP) Member of the House of Representatives) was the only MP available today, so we modified this session into a “Dialogue with an MP”. The moderator for this particular session is Ms. NISHIMURA Misaki, member of the Japan Peace Committee.

Nishimura: Hello friends. I am Nishimura Misaki of the Japan Peace Committee. Allow me first to introduce you Mr. Kasai Akira, Member of the House of Representatives, who was kind enough to agree to take part in this session. Actually, he is talking to us on-line from a venue in Hiroshima. How do you do, Mr. Kasai? You are a second-generation hibakusha MP, and in that capacity, attended the TPNW negotiating conference in 2017. Without further ado, I would like to pass the microphone over to you to tell us what it means for Japan to join that treaty, the role of the MPs in that, and where the Japanese Diet is now in relation to the TPNW.

Kasai: Dear friends watching us on-line from around Japan, some as delegates to the 2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs, I am so glad to greet you. I am Kasai Akira, Japanese Communist Party member of the House of Representatives.

You may know that the TPNW, in its preamble, mentions “parliamentarians” along with hibakusha and NGOs, as major actors representing “public conscience” for promoting the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This is the first time that an U.N. document refers to “parliamentarians” explicitly.

This morning, I went to Peace Park and presented a wreath of flowers to the Cenotaph devoted to the A-bomb dead. As it is the first Hiroshima Day since the TPNW took effect, I felt very humbled to think that I should bear a heavy responsibility in my role as an MP of the only A-bombed nation in war.

Four years ago, on July 7th, the U.N. adopted the first treaty in human history to outlaw nuclear weapons. I, as JCP representative member of “Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND)”, took part in that historic meeting. I still remember vividly that moving moment and the immense joy I shared with hibakusha and other participants at the adoption of the treaty.

At that time, I felt as if I was witnessing the end of the reign of nuclear powers over the world. They had been taken over by countries and civil society that constituted together a majority

force on the planet. Nuclear weapon possessing countries, the U.S., China and others, are still clinging to nuclear weapons, but now we can condemn them as “violators of international law”. The time has come for us to work together to drive these pronuclear forces into a corner.

Now that the TPNW is in force, the focus of our attention is what the Japanese government is going to do with that treaty. If Japan, as an A-bombed nation, joins the TPNW, it would make a tremendous impact on the world: it would accelerate the global tide towards a “world without nuclear weapons” and contribute to peace and stability in Northeast Asia, as well as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We parliamentarians are expected to do our utmost to realize that. This is what the treaty says.

We in the Diet have already received petitions from over the country all asking for Japan to participate in, and sign and ratify the TPNW.

Since the TPNW was adopted at the U.N., the House of Representatives has received 10 petitions of four different types introduced by the JCP or the Constitutional Democratic Party (Rikken Minshu Party), as well as 388 resolutions from local councils. The PNND, which is a non-partisan group of parliamentarians, has begun deliberating how it should position itself in relation with the TPNW.

The “Rally for demanding the Japanese Government sign and ratify the TPNW” was organized by Japan Hidankyo on January 22nd, the day the treaty took effect. Representatives from all political parties including myself were there and heard hibakusha declaring: “we hibakusha have no time to spare. We want the Diet to seriously discuss Japan’s joining the treaty and to offer hibakusha opportunities to testify about atomic bombing consequences.”

However, in a Diet session held on the same day, Prime Minister Suga reiterated that he had “no intention of signing the treaty”. Also, at the Peace Memorial Ceremony this morning, he did not say a word about the treaty. Is it acceptable that a government of the only nation that was devastated by atomic weapons used in war continues to turn its back on the TPNW, which is now in force? With China and the U.S. competing for global supremacy, is it right to continue to rely on the U.S. “nuclear umbrella” or the “nuclear deterrence” that presupposes the use of nuclear weapons in the event of emergency? The position the Japanese government will adopt when attending or if it attends the TPNW Conference of Parties next year, is of utmost importance.

Four years ago, in 2017, only three countries had ratified the treaty. Today, overcoming all kinds of obstacles set by nuclear powers, as many as 55 countries have ratified it. It is expected that 70 will have done so by the end of this year. The flow towards “a world without nuclear

weapons has grown and become unstoppable.

When we look around the world, we see promising signs of change happening in the countries that depend on the U.S. “nuclear umbrella” for security. In particular, in Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Italy, between 60 and 70 percent of the general public support their country joining the treaty. In Norway, the Labour Party, which is in favor of joining the TPNW, is mobilizing to win the general election this autumn and take back power.

In Japan, 71 percent of the public think that Japan should “join the treaty” and 85 percent believe that our country should “participate in the TPNW Conference of Parties”. In addition, the general election is at hand. This situation is a window of opportunity for us to build strong public opinion and a popular movement to ensure a majority of Diet seats for candidates who support the TPNW and to establish a government that will make Japan join the treaty as a fully-fledged party to the TPNW. Let us not miss this opportunity!!

I, as a parliamentarian and second-generation hibakusha, am resolved to do my best to fight through the election campaign until the victory. We will do this by developing joint struggle between citizens and opposition parties in this A-bombed country, while allowing the JCP to obtain more Diet seats. We will thus be able to initiate a regime change that will put into place a government of a citizens’ coalition and ensure that Japan joins the TPNW.

In the current situation, where there is no end in sight for the explosion of COVID-19 infection and U.S.-China confrontation is deepening, we must build on this year’s World Conference to make a contribution worthy of civil society actors and achieve further progress towards a “just and peaceful world without nuclear weapons”.

Dialogue with College and High School Students

Nishimura: Thank you Mr. Kasai. Now I invite high school and college students from Hiroshima to join us and ask questions to Mr. Kasai in turn. First is Yuippie, a college student.

Yuippie: I am Yuippie. I am a student at a college in the Western Japan region. Thank you for allowing me to ask questions in this session.

Mr. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), turned down the City of Hiroshima’s request to the IOC to observe a minute of silence at 8:15 a.m., the time when the bomb was dropped. In this context, I want to question also the attitude of the Japanese government, which did not say anything critical about it. As far as I know, Mr. Bach had visited Hiroshima Peace Park before the Games, on July 15. He maybe wanted to show

that the IOC was really committed to peace. He met with hibakusha and listened to their testimonies. His negative reaction to Hiroshima City's request made us angry and I wonder if his trip to Hiroshima had any meaning for him. It must be remembered that he defied the opposition of Hiroshima citizens to his visit to the A-bombed city in that critical period of the pandemic. Having made such an unwanted call, he should have considered it an obligation as the IOC President to pay tribute to those who died by observing a moment of silence on August 6 and by speaking about the hibakusha and their long-standing desire. What the IOC President did points to his profound disregard of the citizens' feelings. Mr. Kasai, could you tell us how you see the attitude taken by Mr. Bach and the Japanese government?

Nishimura: Mr. Kasai, could you respond to this?

Kasai: Yes, Ms. Nishimura. Thank you for the question. Yes, Yuippie, you are right. The media reported that the government neglected the voice of Japanese people who were saying that "human lives are more valuable than the Games" and forced the games to take place despite the risk of exacerbating the pandemic. As a matter of fact, yesterday, 5,042 people in Tokyo and 15,263 nationwide contracted COVID-19. The explosion of contagion and "overshoot" are so widespread that they cannot be controlled any more. In addition, I am really outraged by the IOC President's refusal to observe a moment of silence to remember the Hiroshima atomic bomb disaster on August 6, the anniversary of the bombing. Aren't the Olympic Games a celebration of peace? What was the purpose of Mr. Bach's visit to Hiroshima? We cannot help asking. To tell you frankly, I see in what the IOC President says and does a lack of respect for human lives and the history of Japan as the Olympic Games host country, and a neglect of Hiroshima citizens' feelings. In that sense, I share your frustration and anger.

But then, what is the reason why Prime Minister Suga remains silent facing such disrespect. I would like to ask the Prime Minister directly, but I can guess that he does not protest Mr. Bach's words and actions because basically, he does not see anything wrong there. I mean that he thinks and feels in the same way as Mr. Bach does. P.M. Suga puts the Olympic Games before protection of human lives and refuses to sign the TPNW in disregard of the aspiration of Hiroshima citizens. He takes the weight of human lives very lightly even though, as Prime Minister of our country, he is responsible for the safety and security of the population. This is what the incident has shown us.

This is why we should make the present government step down and replace it with a new one that is committed to saving and protecting human lives. It is not too late to stop the Games and implement comprehensive measures to combat the virus. We can end the government that has "no intention to sign the TPNW" and achieve a regime change that will make Japan join the treaty. Now is the time for this. I always put the hibakusha paper crane pin you see here

on my chest. It is my dream to get a regime change and form a new cabinet in which all members, Prime Minister and all other ministers have this pin on their chest.

The future belongs to young people like you. You are the pioneers of what is going to happen. In this regard, I am happy to note that a new movement is emerging among young people to massively “go to vote”. By chance, the general election for the House of Representatives is only a few months away. Let us all go to vote and change the government. Let us establish a new government that is committed to protecting human lives and that will allow Japan to participate in the TPNW Conference of Parties next year. I count on you, Yuippie and other young people to join us in working together for this goal.

Nishimura: Thank you Yuippie and Mr. Kasai. It is now the turn of Polly, a high school student.

Polly: I am Polly, a high school first grader. I am active in a high school club that studies peace issues. My question is related to what I have thought through these activities. I think that there is lots of violence in this world. I feel that peace has become a goal too distant to be attained, even if we succeed in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will not be visible even when we will have reached a point, somewhere near a sustainable society. The definition of peace accepted in the international community is a state where there is no war, but I am still thinking if peace is merely the opposite of the present world filled with violence. Mr. Kasai, could you tell us what true peace means to you.

Kasai: Thank you for the question, Polly. It is a very big question which I want to share with all of us here and to think about. Being asked straightforwardly “what is peace” as you have done, I feel nervous and excited, not knowing if I could properly answer, but I will try. Well, I think that the definition of peace widely accepted in Japan and the world today could be “the state of society where life and dignity of each individual are respected”.

For the sake of that peace, we must abolish war which is the worst form of violence and eliminate nuclear weapons, the worst of weapons that indiscriminately take the lives of massive numbers of people in war. And it is that peace we have been working for steadfastly with perseverance, in the two A-bombed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and around the country. What is crucially important at this moment is that we make sure that the calls of the hibakusha and the Japanese people for “no more hibakusha” and “away with nuclear weapons” are taken forward across generations. We must continue to do so all the way until we reach the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. At the same time, we must keep a record of each step we take correctly in history. We must remain committed to our cause and never give up till our voices are heard. I am sure that in this way we can change politics and society. Remember. It took 76 long years to get a treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons in place. We were able to

come this far thanks to the hibakusha and their lifelong campaigning, the movement against A and H Bombs, and important mobilization of Japanese people for the cause.

After the TPNW entered into force, as Mr. Sakuma has just told us, people who were exposed to radioactive “black rain” and fought a very hard legal struggle through the last forty and some years, eventually obtained state recognition as hibakusha and hibakusha handbooks have been distributed to them at last. From now on, we have to build on this victory, which we won by perseverant efforts and continuing to call for justice. We must cooperate and work together to put in place a government worthy of the A-bombed country, one that will make Japan a party to the TPNW. It will be the start of our journey to a “world without nuclear weapons”.

You see, Polly, I am sure, you, as a high school student, have had to raise your voice to be heard and you are studying different questions about peace. And I believe what motivates you to act as you do is certainly the knowledge about the realities of atomic bombing. I myself was raised by a mother who experienced the atomic bombing in Hiroshima when she was 14 years old. She used to tell me her story and always warned me that the tragedy she lived through should never be repeated. Forty-eight years ago, I was a college student when I attended the Hiroshima Day Rally of the World Conference for the first time. Since then, I have visited more than fifty countries on speaking tours, and, as a second-generation hibakusha, I have spoken about my mother and her life story to illustrate the actual effects of atomic bombing and I have called on the public to act for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Today, young people like yourselves are interviewing hibakusha about the realities of the atomic bombing. They are trying to preserve the knowledge and memories of the hibakusha, along with their aspiration for nuclear weapon abolition, and to pass them on to younger generations. You make the hibakusha’s call your own call and, in this process, you progressively change your society, transform it into a community of peace where the life and dignity of each individual are respected and protected. I want you to keep keeping on. I will do the same.

Nishimura: Mr. Kasai, Yuippie and Polly, thank you. Let us mobilize ourselves for the general election campaign this fall, so that PMs willing to work for a nuclear-weapons-free world will form a majority in the Diet. Thank you for your attendance.