

Tanaka Yasujiro
Hibakusha of Nagasaki

We have only one life

Dear friends gathering at this World Conference against A and H Bombs, welcome to Nagasaki. I am Tanaka Yasujiro. I feel honored to speak before you today. Thank you for this opportunity.

We often say, "We have only one life".

Our lives have been given from our fathers and mothers. If you go back 10 generations on your family records, you are connected with 1000 people. Going back 20 generations, more than 10,000 people are connected with you. You and I live now, succeeding the lives of all these people who lived in the past. It's like a miracle. We must not lose this precious life to war.

Japan was waging a war of aggression until 1945. At the close of the war, the abominable atomic bombs were dropped. Almost 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki, most of them civilians not involved in the war effort, were indiscriminately killed. Still now, about 127,000 A-bomb survivors are battling to live, while suffering from various kinds of health conditions as the aftereffects of the A-bombing.

On that day, I was 3 years old. I was exposed to the A-bomb flash and blast on the street in Shin-Nakagawamachi, in the eastern part of Nagasaki City, at 3.4 kilometers from ground zero. I was 10 meters from our house, playing with my friend, my grandmother (56 years old) and my baby sister.

Suddenly, I was engulfed in a bright bluish-white light, equivalent to tens of thousands of camera flashes released at once. As soon as we jumped into a neighbor's house with fright, an enormous blast came from the right side.

After a while we went outside. I saw an orange colored sun shining dimly in the dark sky. I heard no sound. A mysterious silence reigned. Fortunately, all of us – my grandmother, baby sister and myself – were unhurt and we hurried back home. I heard that my mother (36 years old), who was inside our home, had numerous small fragments of glass stuck in her back.

I myself have no memory of the misery and tragic conditions created by the atomic bombing around that time. My grandmother died 47 years ago at age 85 and my mother died 24 years ago at 89, both from kidney disease with much pain and suffering. My little sister died 4 years ago in February at age 72 after 3 years of hospitalization. She also suffered kidney failure.

Probably due to the bomb blast, I suffered hearing difficulty in my right year. I was a weak child, susceptible to colds and skin disease. Due to my ugly scabby skin, especially in summer, I was often bullied by my classmates in my junior high and high school days.

Our family was poor and often had difficulty getting food on the table, but thanks to the

help extended by many people around us, I have survived until today.

Hibakusha were not allowed to live decently nor die as humans. Such suffering should never be experienced by any young person living in the present world. We must learn from the past, face the present society, and explore how we should live in the future. Those who do not learn from the past are not qualified to talk about the future.

Now, I often have the opportunity to talk about the atrocity of the atomic bombings before high school students who come to Nagasaki on their school trips. With bright eyes, they earnestly listen to my story while taking lots of notes. I find hope for the future in these young friends.

I want to hand over the baton of peace to many of these friends. The number of surviving Hibakusha was 127,000 as of March 2020. Their average age was 83.94. Nine thousand Hibakusha died during the last year. In several years time, there will be no Hibakusha left alive. With a hope that those young people who have listened to our stories will become messengers for peace and retell our accounts, we continue to share our stories every day before younger generations.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22, 2021. For us Hibakusha, it is like a dream come true. We have come one step closer to a nuclear weapon-free world. However, Japan, the only country to have suffered the atomic bombing, continues to turn its back on the treaty. Isn't that strange? We Hibakusha are committed to our activities urging our government to sign and ratify the TPNW, as the only A-bombed country in war.

Each of us has only one life, so let us treasure today and this very moment, while being kind to others and to ourselves. "Blessed are the Peacemakers." Let us take spiritual nourishment from this, and stand up together to take action to create peace.

Shalom. Let there be peace on earth!