

International Meeting
2020 World Conference against A and H Bombs
August 2, 2020

Setsuko Thurlow
Hibakusha of Hiroshima

Dear friends joining in this World Conference against A and H Bombs,

I would like to express my profound respect to all of you who have gathered from Japan and across the world with ardent wishes and dedicated efforts for the abolition of nuclear weapons. I sincerely pray for the success of this conference in discussing the pressing issues we face and in finding ways to solve them.

Already 75 years have passed since that day. Together with you, I wanted to have an opportunity to share my deep sorrow and indignation over my families, classmates and countless others who perished in Hiroshima, and to reaffirm my commitment to ensuring that their deaths would not be in vain.

I have had a sense of isolation as the only actively involved Hibakusha to witness the A-bombing in the vast area of eastern Canada. But I strongly believe it is my mission to keep on working and I cannot thank enough for being given a special time of 75 years, after rescued from the fallen building in flames on that day. I also feel the significance of working together with more people in Canada to continue conveying our earnest desire of abolishing nuclear weapons.

This summer, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, like in many cities of North America and Europe, we in Toronto are also preparing to hold an online commemorative event to mark the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing. It was 45 years ago that we held the first peace memorial ceremony in the city hall of Toronto with the support of the mayors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Toronto. Around that time, general public and mass media were mostly silent about nuclear issues. Thanks to our hard work over the years, more and more people are aware of the problem in recent days and are mobilized to push for changes socially and politically. As one of those who initiated the movement, I am especially grateful for and satisfied with the current mobilization among people.

At the 75th year since the atomic bombing, the first thing coming to my mind is the image and memory of many deceased Hibakusha whom I respect. Here is a comment by a psychoanalyst about Hibakusha: “Hibakusha experienced ‘lifelong encounter with death’”. This has a profound meaning, and I myself have experienced such moments many times in the past.

One of such moments was the time when the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted on July 7, 2017 at the United Nations. People in the conference hall stood up all at once with cheers and cries of joy, shook hands and hugged one another. But I remain seated. In tears, I was silently talking with hundreds of thousands of souls of the deceased of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as I wanted to convey to them the great news as soon as possible. I said to them, “Please rejoice. We have taken the first step to fulfill our promise to you, to make your death meaningful. We still have a long way to go, but please stay with us until the day we finally achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons.” With closed eyes, I dried my tears and prayed.

I also had similar experiences in Nayarit, Vienna, Geneva and Oslo. Deep in my heart, I identify myself with the souls of the deceased of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and have a strong desire to share with them these precious moments in my life.

I want to share with you some information on the projects we are working on to mark the 75th anniversary. As part of ICAN’s projects, we sent a letter in my name directly to the heads of 197 states, asking them to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The content of the letters are suited to nuclear-armed states, non-nuclear states and nuclear dependent states respectively. Through my own experience I emphasized the cruel, inhuman nature of nuclear weapons. In my letter to Prime Minister Abe, I stressed that Japan, as the A-bombed country, had a special moral responsibility to take the leadership of the movement to eliminate nuclear weapons. And I proposed that he should listen to the Hibakusha and join democratic discussions on Japan’s nuclear policy with majority of the people of Japan who aspire for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Secondly, we worked on the project of writing a letter to the prime minister of Canada.

According to a recent research by a historian, the atomic bombs used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were produced by the Manhattan Project jointly sponsored by the U.S., U.K. and Canada and it was revealed that uranium used in the production of the bombs was provided by Canada. In my letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, I requested that Canada should publicly acknowledge the historical fact and express his formal regret on the role played by Canada in the atomic bombing. I also urged that Canada should sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Thirdly, in Canada's capital city Ottawa, it is planned that on August 6 and 9, marking the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing, they will toll the bell 75 times from the Peace Tower standing in the center of the parliament house.

In a variety of ways and forms like these, the people of Canada are holding a number of projects to pay homage to the souls of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This shows the growing awareness of citizens toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Friends, I wish you every success of this World Conference against A and H Bombs.