

80 Years Since the Atomic Bombings To Learn and Convey the Inhumanity of Nuclear Weapons

On the occasion of the “International Civil Society Forum to Abolish Nuclear Weapons – 80 Years since the Atomic Bombings,” we introduce two documents by Nihon Hidankyo (the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations) in order to deeply understand the reality of the damage caused by the atomic bombings, and just how inhumane nuclear weapons are.

■ From Nihon Hidankyo’s booklet “From Hibakusha to You: What We Want to Convey”, published by Iwanami (July 2021)

An atomic bomb dropped by the US forces exploded in the sky, at the height of approximately 600 meters, over the City of Hiroshima at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945.

Three days later, on August 9, another bomb exploded, at the height of approximately 500 meters, over the City of Nagasaki at 11:02 a.m. The fireballs created by the explosions reached some millions of degrees Celsius in the sky, and they remained at from 3,000 to 5,000 degrees even on the ground. The strong heat rays started fires as far as around 2 kilometers from the hypocenters and killed and injured many. The air blasts from the explosions were massive enough to crush in an instant all wooden houses within a radius of 1.5 kilometers from the hypocenters.

In this way, the atomic bombs brought strong heat rays and air blasts such as no other weapons had been able to do before. However, a decisive difference was that they released radiation that destroyed human cells and injured human genes. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki utilized the energy released from the nuclear fission of uranium and plutonium, respectively. The horror of the atomic bomb can be understood not only in the scale of the devastation at the time of the explosion, but also through its long-lasting effects on the human body.

Some could escape the heat waves and blasts at the time of the explosion; others entered the cities afterward to search and rescue or to cremate family members. But they too, one after another, succumbed to death by acute radiation syndrome. By the end of that year, 1945, more than 140,000 people had died in Hiroshima and more than 70,000 in Nagasaki. Those who somehow managed to survive the bombings had to live with the fear of death from the radiation of the bomb.

Few of those who experienced the atomic bomb could figure out what happened on that day. Not a few testimonies were along the lines of “(I believed) my home had been directly hit by a bomb,” or “I thought a gas tank nearby had been bombed.” It was not until they went outside that they witnessed a scene that could only be described as “hell.”

■ From “No More Hibakusha -- Atomic Bomb Victims’ Basic Demand” (November 1984)

What the Atomic Bombing Did

Those atomic bombs turned Hiroshima and Nagasaki into dead cities: heaps of burnt bodies inflamed and swollen; bodies with eyeballs protruding and burst bellies; burnt-out street cars with their

passengers; people trapped and incinerated under collapsed buildings; lines of ghost-like figures with skin hanging down in strips. It was a sight so horrible as never to be imagined in this world. We could save neither children nor parents, nor even give water to the people in the throes of death. We can never forget the bitterness and frustration of being able to do nothing to help them.

People who survived the bombing, and those who entered the city to search for relatives or help victims were also struck down by radiation and died after losing their hair and bleeding.

Even survivors continue to bear the burdens with those atomic bombs.

"I have no house. I lost everything. I have never found anything of enjoyment in my life. I am nothing but a living corpse." "I have had to spend all my life in bed." "I cannot work like other people. People way I am lazy. Who is responsible for making me what I am?"

Fear of discrimination in marriage or employment has made many people hide the fact that they are A-bomb victims. Worried by even a slight cold, blaming it on the atomic bomb, the hibakusha feel all the time as if they were carrying an explosive, fearing that A-bomb disease may hit them at any time, or that genetically, radiation will effect their children.

Those whose relatives were killed by the atomic bombs also live in anger and sorrow.

"I lost all my relatives and my hometown." "The sorrow of a parent unable to save her child will never leave me as long as I live." "It is impossible to forget my husband, who disappeared completely from the day the bomb was dropped. I remember him as if it were only yesterday." "My sister struggled against disease till her death."

The atomic bombs wiped out two cities in a flash, killing thousands of people without discrimination. It was the "hell" of the first nuclear war ever experienced, and the damage to body, life and heart of the victims has never ended. It doesn't allow them to live or die as humans. By their very nature, nuclear weapons are the weapons of madness, bringing total extinction. They are weapons so evil that humanity must never accept them.

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In the Nobel Prize lecture upon receiving the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize, Nihon Hidankyo Co-Chair Tanaka Terumi spoke of the Hibakusha's determination to "save humanity from its crisis through the lessons learned from our experiences, while at the same time saving ourselves." and based upon this, shared how they have continued the movement demanding both "the abolition of nuclear weapons, and State compensation for the atomic bomb damage suffered." He additionally spoke of their movement in solidarity with the many overseas Hibakusha, including Korean Hibakusha who were exposed to the atomic bombings in Japan and returned to their home countries, as well as many Hibakusha who emigrated to the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, and other countries after the war.

Let us listen to such testimony of the Hibakusha, and learn from their experiences and their movement. And, in solidarity with victims and survivors around the world who have suffered from the production, testing, use and all other stages of nuclear weapons, let us work together to deepen our understanding of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, and together abolish them.

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Japan Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons