

2007 Nagasaki Peace Declaration

“What crime did these children commit?”

Holding up a picture of a boy horribly burned by the heat of the atomic bomb, Iccho Itoh made this impassioned plea before the International Court of Justice some 12 years ago, not long after he was elected mayor of Nagasaki. In April of this year, former mayor Itoh was shot dead in a wanton act of violence. We vow to carry on his commitment to the elimination of nuclear arms, true to the statement made together with the hibakusha atomic bomb survivors that “nuclear weapons and humanity cannot coexist.”

On August 9, 1945 at 11:02 a.m., a single atomic bomb dropped by a United States military aircraft exploded at a height of 500 meters. The intense heat rays and severe blast winds, together with enormous amounts of radiation, claimed 74,000 lives and inflicted terrible injuries on 75,000 others, filling the ruined land and rivers with corpses. Even today, the charnel house atop the hill in Peace Park serves as the resting place for the bones of over 9,000 people whose names remain unknown.

The 1996 advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice that “the use and threat of nuclear weapons is generally contrary to international law” stands as an important warning to mankind. Subsequently, the nuclear weapon states were understood to have committed to an “unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish total elimination of their nuclear arsenals” at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Nevertheless, instead of progress in nuclear disarmament, we are facing a crisis in terms of the breakdown of the very structure of nuclear non-proliferation. In addition to the nuclear weapon states of the US, Russia, the UK, France and China, the countries of India, Pakistan and North Korea have taken up nuclear arms under the excuse of self-defense. In the Middle East also, the nuclear non-proliferation structure is being shaken by Israel, generally regarded as possessing nuclear weapons, and by the suspicions of nuclear development raised by Iran.

With the appearance of new nuclear weapon states comes increased danger of actual use, as well as the leakage of nuclear-related technology. The Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program by the United States threatens to reignite the nuclear arms race.

The United States and the other nuclear weapon states must embark on sincere efforts to eliminate their own nuclear weapons, moving beyond mere discussion of non-proliferation. Another major force for nuclear abolition would be for scientists and engineers to refuse to cooperate in nuclear weapons development.

The Japanese government, as the government of a nation that has experienced nuclear devastation, must demonstrate strong leadership in the context of international society for the elimination of nuclear weapons, based on the ideals of peace and renunciation of war contained in the Japanese Constitution.

The realization of the Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone concept, to include Mongolia and the nuclear weapon-free zone in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, must also be pursued, along with resolute cooperation in the six-party talks with respect to nuclear renunciation by North Korea.

Today, in the midst of erroneous interpretation of the atomic bombings and discussion of potential nuclear weapons possession even in Japan, it is necessary to enact the Three Non-Nuclear Principles into law, not merely stating them as national policy.

Urgent efforts are also needed to further enhance relief measures for the atomic bomb survivors, both at home and overseas, who have struggled for decades with radiation-related disorders and accompanying anxiety. The experiences of the atomic bomb survivors form an essential starting point for the elimination of nuclear arms, and the inhumanity and atrocity that they suffered must be told to the world. The use of nuclear weapons can never be permitted or considered acceptable, for any reason whatsoever.

At Sanno Shrine near the hypocenter of the bombing in Nagasaki, two camphor trees spread their leaves skyward. Sixty-two years ago, the sad blackened stumps of these trees poked up from the radioactive rubble. The trees recovered, and seedlings were sent far and wide by children wishing for peace. These second-generation trees are now growing healthily at schools and in towns throughout Japan. Over time, no matter what ill winds may blow, we shall never relinquish our commitment to a future that is free from nuclear weapons.

On this, the 62nd anniversary of the atomic bombing, we pray for the repose of the souls of those who died, and together with the city of Hiroshima, we pledge to work untiringly for the elimination of nuclear weapons and for the achievement of universal, everlasting peace.

Tomihisa Taue
Mayor of Nagasaki
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