

Speech by Masako Wada
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Translated by Japanese Translation and Interpretation Program

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Masako Wada from the Japan Confederation of Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Sufferers Organizations. I am very grateful for this opportunity to see all of you. Today, I'll be speaking about my experience on the day of the bombing and what has happened since then.

I was born in 1943. The atomic bomb was dropped when I was one year and 10 months old. I was at home, 2.9 kilometers away from ground zero in northern Nagasaki. I don't remember anything about what happened on that day. I was able to survive thanks to the landscape of Nagasaki, which is surrounded by mountains. I grew up listening to my mother talking about her experience from time to time.

A fire broke out on the southern side of ground zero. To escape the fire, people near ground zero crossed the mountain to come down into the city. In the brown surface of the mountain, my mother saw the movement of people lined up like ants. Their hair was so matted with blood that she couldn't even tell if they were male or female. They were almost naked. My mother trembled seeing the black, writhing line of people coming down the mountains. Many people are believed to have died on that mountain road.

Right next to my house was a vacant lot due to building evacuation. The bodies that had been abandoned on the street were carried into the lot in garbage carts and piled up on the ground. The corpses were cremated day and night. My mother became desensitized to the smell and the sheer number of people in front of her eyes. She said that she lost her sensitivity as a human being. There was a well at the back of our house. A number of people who had been severely injured

came there for water. Carrying me on her back, my mother cleaned their wounds, and boiled old cloths to disinfect them so they could be used as bandages. She never knew what happened to those people.

My mother was sent to help the doctors at a university auditorium, where a first-aid station had been set up. My mother fainted at the sight of the floor completely covered with people with extremely severe injuries and burns. When she regained consciousness, the first task she was assigned to was to brush off numerous maggots the size of her thumb from the patients. She was 24 years old at the time.

The U.S. forces dropped radio sensors attached to parachutes when they dropped the A-bomb. This was to measure the power, blast and heat of the bomb and report to the headquarters. What actually happened under the atomic cloud? Civilians including the elderly, women, and children died. 210,000 people died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as of December 1945. Each of them had a family and a life. The preciousness of life, human dignity. Didn't the radio sensors report these? My mother would remember the stench and talk about this every year on August 9th, the anniversary of the bombing.

World War II left us with enormous sacrifice and destruction of human lives and property. The United Nations was established on October 24th, 1945, immediately after the end of the War, building on deep reflection and regret. The first chapter of the UN charter states the purpose of the UN – “To maintain international peace and security, we shall, together, ensure that armed forces shall not be used, save in our common interest.”

What has the world been doing to achieve this goal? In 1946, the first UN General Assembly was held and the first resolution was about nuclear disarmament. They decided that it was the first priority for the UN to address. And a new committee was formed to solve the issues regarding nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, nuclear weapons continued to increase and during the cold war, there were as many as 70,000 warheads. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which went into effect in 1970 during the rising sense of crisis regarding a nuclear war, marks its 51st anniversary this year. Article 6 requires all States Parties to the Treaty to negotiate in good faith toward nuclear disarmament.

It's been 76 years since the atomic bombing by the US force. The average age of Hibakusha, or survivors of the bomb, is now 84. Every year around 9,000 people pass away. We Hibakusha have been sincerely and faithfully working towards the abolition of nuclear weapons without taking even a single day of rest. Both the Japanese government and the U.S. government turned a blind eye on those of us who were exposed to radiation for 10 years. We have received no support – neither medical nor economical. With the intensive news censorship by the US, the casualties were completely covered up. We Hibakusha were abandoned when we needed help the most. During a press conference in September 1945, Deputy Commanding General Farrell, the person in charge of the Manhattan project, said, “People who were supposed to die, have already died. There is nobody who is suffering from the radiation.”. After such a statement, Hibakusha, the citizens of the defeated nation had no choice but to remain silent.

The Bikini Accident occurred in 1954, and in 1956, 11 years after the bombing of Japan, Hibakusha who had been hiding and suffering, finally banded together and started to act to make their voices heard. They formed the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations. Our resolution was to not only save ourselves but also through our own experiences, save humankind from the crisis. We stood up and have been working together ever since. In Japan and even from overseas, people who hope for a world without nuclear weapons have been supporting us. We continue to talk about our own experiences although we suffer each and every time we relive our moments of agony and grief. This sense of mission and determination have been sustaining us, the Hibakusha.

On July 7th, 2017, when the UN adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), many hibakusha shared their joy with each other, grateful to have survived to witness this moment. Our joy was for those who had spent their entire lives for this initiative and for the 210,000 people who died on the day of the bombing. The heavy iron doors that we had been pounding on had finally cracked opened a little, and we saw a light coming through. And on January 22nd of this year, our long-held hope and demand, the TPNW went into effect as an international law. While this is a source of jubilation, we acknowledge this as the first step of our new beginning.

What is now required of the world? The threat of the use of nuclear weapons is imminent. The

Doomsday clock shows it is now 100 seconds to midnight, the shortest it has ever been. All people throughout the world must acknowledge that we are all equally facing this crisis. What happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 76 years ago, whether it was deliberate or an accident, the third use of a nuclear weapon will lead to the annihilation of mankind.

76 years ago, there were only four atomic bombs: one in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where a successful nuclear test took place; the two that were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively; and one that was to have been used on Japan if Japan did not surrender. Now, there are more than 13,000 atomic bombs in the world and their power is incomparable to the ones in the past. There were instant deaths, as well as deaths resulting from the heat rays, bomb blast and radiation. People suffer for a long time. The deaths slowly ripple outward from ground zero, and continues to do so to this day, 76 years after the War. We need to acknowledge that what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and perhaps destruction even worse than our worst nightmare, could occur on a global scale.

The coronavirus is spreading across borders. We are terrified by this intangible virus and the world is suffering. Many people are doing whatever they can to manufacture vaccines and to treat patients. Damage from nuclear weapons also spreads across borders. The International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons concluded that no country or organization has treatment options for the victims. Hibakusha have seen or experienced death, disease, poverty and discrimination. These are also what we are seeing right now in the world as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. In a few years there will be various vaccines and things will be under control to some extent.

However, if nuclear weapons are used, there will be nothing left but the earth devoid of human beings. There will be nobody who can be proud of their power, honor, or status. There will be nobody left to take care of the corpses.

Hibakusha are not merely survivors of the atomic bombing. They are the ones who have been taking action to save mankind from this crisis. They are the ones entrusted with this mission. We humans can probably live with the coronavirus, but not with nuclear weapons. We created them, and we'll be the ones to abolish them. This is for the public benefit. To do this, Hibakusha will take whatever time remains to each of them to continue to walk with all of you. It is my most

sincere with that those of you here today who are of young generations will learn, think, speak and act to abolish nuclear weapons, as citizens of the earth. We need your assistance. Let's move this initiative forward together. Thank you.