

To My American Friends

Takeya Sasaki, Lawyer

President of the Japan Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms

1. Introduction

Last December the US Congress passed the Manhattan Project National Historical Park Act, which makes a national historical park out of sites with facilities related to nuclear weapons development at Los Alamos in New Mexico, Hanford in Washington, and Oak Ridge in Tennessee.

In atomic-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki there are concerns that this park might become a shrine to the development and use of the atomic bombs.

This year celebrations of the war victory 70 years ago will be held in various places throughout the US, and there will likely be much excitement. Here in Japan it is 70 years since the atomic bombings, and more people are saying that humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist, and that we should abolish nuclear weapons. There are concerns that atomic bombing survivors are aging and dying, and that those who knew what the bombings were really like will be gone. As such, we are wondering how to preserve their memories. Mainly on August 6th and 9th, the bombing anniversaries, there will be many events for a world free of nuclear weapons. Definitely, come and visit Hiroshima then.

2. Views of Foreign High School Students Studying in Hiroshima

The Hiroshima newspaper *Chugoku Shimbun* has a feature called “Peace Seeds” in which 44 students from 6th- to 12th-graders, who conceive and expand upon the importance of peace and life from a number of viewpoints, come up with themes, gather material, and write the feature, which is subtitled “Teens in Hiroshima Sow Seeds of Peace.”

This year’s January 22 “Peace Seeds” used “International students share impressions of Hiroshima” as subject matter for an article on how junior writers and six foreign students in Hiroshima high schools see the atomic bombing damage and the city’s current state, and their conversations on the Hiroshima bombing and peace.

Jonathan Valuriya, a 17-year-old US student, said, “The atomic bombing was a sad event, and it’s something I don’t really want to think about. In the United States, we were only taught that the atomic bombings were unfortunate, but if it had not been for the bombings, the war would have gone on. Nuclear weapons aren’t bad. They provide deterrence. People know the risk of using nuclear weapons, so no one will actually use them. Because they’re kept under tight control, it’s unlikely that terrorists can get their hands on them.”

3. Views of Hiroshima Junior High School Students

Riho Kito, a Hiroshima 7th-grader, responded to this view by saying, “Honestly speaking, I was shocked to hear someone from a nuclear weapon state say that ‘Nuclear weapons aren’t bad,’ or that they don’t know about this issue and aren’t interested. I thought something must have left an impression on them during their time in Hiroshima. If they think there’s a risk in possessing nuclear weapons, they should be more concerned about this and should be thinking that these weapons should be abolished.”

Just as students in American schools are not taught about the atomic bombings, in our country students are not taught modern history about what a reckless war of aggression we committed against our neighbors and other Asian countries, and increasing numbers of people in younger generations are ignorant of the war that previous generations caused. I feel

the need for peace education.

4. Did the Atomic Bombs Really End the War?

Since the end of World War II, it has continuously been said that “the atomic bombs ended the war,” but that is wrong. There is a deep-rooted mythology that contradicts the general knowledge of historical research, and here again one feels the importance of education.

On August 6, 1945 Japan had hardly any capacity for continuing the war. Japan had lost nearly all its warships, it had not a single aircraft which could fly at altitudes of 10,000 meters like B29s, and not a single anti-aircraft gun that could shoot them down. At least 200 cities throughout Japan including Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya had been attacked from the sky and sea. Because of US bombings, which continued until August 15 when the war ended, 330,000 people died, 430,000 people were injured, and as many as 9.7 million people had lost their homes and belongings. The land was completely devastated.

Japan’s surrender was a matter of time. The situation was such that even without using the atomic bombs, Japan’s loss was assured, and the US military knew this from Japanese communications that it had decoded.

On May 7 Germany had surrendered unconditionally. The next day a cease-fire was proclaimed, and the war in Europe ended. At the Yalta Conference the US, UK, and USSR had made a secret agreement that within three months of Germany’s surrender the USSR would join the war against Japan. During this three-month period, on July 16 at the Alamogordo bombing range in New Mexico’s desert, humanity’s first nuclear test using plutonium, Trinity, was conducted.

The US government conducted this test so that it would occupy Japan, make the USSR give up domination of East Asia, and secure an advantageous position against the USSR, and then the US went on to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki under a global strategy by which it would take the lead in postwar world politics, and which was backed by nuclear weapons.

The bombings were cruel, indiscriminate attacks that violated international law. They were blind bombings aimed at ordinary people, who were noncombatants, and at cities. They were nuclear tests which completely destroyed people and cities. There was no reason or need at all to use nuclear weapons.

By December of that year the atomic bombings had claimed 140,000 lives in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki. In Hiroshima on August 6 the people who died instantly or within the day totaled 70,000. Human beings were burned and charred like tree leaves, and there were piles of corpses. The city disappeared in an instant. The atomic bombings were the biggest acts of violence in human history, and the word “unfortunate” is totally inadequate to describe them.

5. “Nuclear Weapons Aren’t Bad”?

Let’s examine the damage of the atomic bombings.

(1) First is radiation. Even before a bomb’s explosion, nuclear fission chain reactions were already occurring within its vessel, and radiation was being released.

Neutron radiation, which is extremely powerful, exited through the steel vessel, reached the ground, and damaged people’s bodies while passing through them.

One-tenth of a second after the explosion, a fireball of gamma rays emitted by the bomb attained a temperature of 7,700 degrees, which is hotter than the sun, grew to 400 meters in diameter, and burst. The resulting neutron radiation and gamma rays instantly ripped through people’s bodies, damaging their cells and DNA.

But exposure to the initial radiation is not the only problem. People were also exposed to the residual radiation of deadly nuclear fission products, unfissioned nuclear materials, induced radioactivity emitted by activated objects, radioactive fallout from the sky, and other sources. Victims received not only external exposure, but also internal exposure from alpha rays, beta rays, and other radiation ingested by eating, drinking, and breathing.

(2) Second is heat rays. After the initial radiation, people were assaulted by powerful, blinding heat rays. People who were outdoors had no time to hide, and were severely burned by the heat rays. Nearly all the people within 1 km of ground zero and with no shielding died within a week.

(3) Third is the shock wave. After the heat rays came the shock wave and blast. The shock wave blew buildings away; 10.1 seconds after the explosion it reached a radius of 4 km, erasing the city of Hiroshima.

(4) Fourth is fires. Buildings within 3 km of ground zero spontaneously ignited because of the heat rays. The simultaneous occurrence of many buildings created a huge fire that completely burned 90% of the houses within a 3-km radius.

(5) Fifth is the black rain. The “black rain,” which contained radioactive substances, wet people’s heads, faces, and bodies, and exposed them to radiation.

(6) And finally there are the atomic bomb-induced illnesses. Immediately after the bombing, radiation made the victims suffer acute symptoms such as bleeding from their noses and gums, and loss of their hair. They also had fevers and diarrhea, which killed many people.

Owing to radiation exposure, the bombing survivors’ cells were damaged and their DNA was torn. Many survivors suffered late-onset diseases such as cancer and leukemia 10 years or more later because damage was repaired with errors.

Atomic bombing survivors have lived through the postwar years while always staring death in the face, and some still live now, while suffering with chronic illnesses (aftereffects) such as cancer, leukemia, heart attacks, impaired liver function, cataracts, and hypothyroidism.

We lawyers have initiated lawsuits against the government contending that the survivors’ illnesses are caused by the atomic bombings, and continue to win (see the paper by Masayoshi Naito among these *Recommendations*).

6. In Your Country, Too

The village of Tularosa, about 65 km southeast of the Trinity test site, and people living in, as well as people from, the surrounding area claimed that it is evident that there is an unusually large number of cases, including people born after the war, of thyroid cancer and other solid cancers, and of leukemia, with the only conceivable explanation being that they ingested food and water contaminated with radioactive fallout, and suffered internal exposure. On January 5 of this year there was a newspaper article stating that these people are seeking a legal amendment so that they too would be covered by the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), which applies to onsite participants of atmospheric nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site, to downwinders who lived nearby, and to uranium mine workers.

Last September a National Cancer Institute research team launched a study of radiation exposure. They interviewed nine people who had lived in the area since the days of the tests, and plan to cover more people. These people too likely suffered in the same way as Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors. “Nuclear weapons aren’t bad” is simply not a tenable statement.

7. Are Nuclear Weapons Kept Under Tight Control?

Nuclear weapons are not put in armories and kept under tight control. In your country, in which direction are nuclear weapons aimed? It is likely that India aims its nuclear weapons at Pakistan, which aims its at India. Countless nuclear weapons are deployed so they can be used at any time, and they are on kept on standby. And nuclear weapons are mobile because they are carried around in aircraft and on submarines.

It is said that from 1950 to 1968 there were about 700, or perhaps more, incidents such as accidents by aircraft carrying nuclear weapons. Although we lack much information because for reasons including military secrecy, the accidents cited below are public knowledge.

The first was in 1961, when an Air Force bomber carrying two hydrogen bombs that were each 260 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb crashed because of a fuel leak near Goldsboro, North Carolina. One bomb was carried by its open parachute and landed in a pasture, caught in a tree. Do you know about this accident? The arming mechanism was activated by the shock. Three of four safety mechanisms did not work, and the fourth miraculously averted a major catastrophe.

The second happened in January 1966 when a US Air Force B-52G carrying four hydrogen bombs collided with a KC-135 tanker during an attempt to refuel and crashed near Palomares, Spain. Uranium and plutonium were scattered and contaminated the soil. Even now, plutonium exceeding the standard is detected at the site.

The third was in 1968, when a US Air Force B-52 carrying four hydrogen bombs had a fire and crashed on sea ice near Thule Air Base in a Danish-administered area of Greenland. A nuclear warhead ruptured and caused widespread radioactive contamination.

There was also an accident near Japan in December 1965 when an aircraft with a hydrogen bomb fell off the US aircraft carrier USS *Ticonderoga* at sea 150 km southeast of Kikai Island.

Six years ago, in February 2009, there was an accident in the Atlantic Ocean when a French nuclear-powered submarine armed with nuclear weapons collided with a British submarine.

Catastrophic accidents were avoided, but as long as people handle nuclear weapons, there is no telling when an accident will happen, or when the weapons will be used. There is no basis at all for saying that “no one will actually use them.”

8. Let's Bid Farewell to Nuclear Weapons

In April 2010 the International Committee of the Red Cross issued a statement that nuclear weapons are inhumane. This was followed in May by an NPT Review Conference which issued a statement on its “deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that these weapons could be used and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons.”

Since 2011 the UN General Assembly First Committee has continued to issue statements each year on the inhumaneness of nuclear weapons. The first statement was by 34 countries, which ballooned to 80 and then 125 countries, and last year's statement was by 155 countries.

Other than the UN, there were 127 government delegations at the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo in March 2013, 148 at the second conference in Nayarit, Mexico in February 2014, and 158 at the third conference in Vienna in December 2014. The US government too found itself obliged to participate. A new trend toward abolition, which is driven by the inhumaneness of nuclear weapons, has boosted the global movement for abolishing nuclear weapons to the point where there is no turning it back.

Nuclear weapons are the instruments of hell. I think that whatever humans have created, they can also eliminate.

There are still as many as 16,000 nuclear weapons in the world. Even though their inhumaneness is an issue, and even though the US president has called for achieving a world without nuclear weapons, one sees no signs of an upsurge in the American movement to give up nuclear weapons. I wonder if you could tell me why.

9. An Overview of These *Recommendations*

We Japanese lawyers have considered many things to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, and have tried a number of approaches. This collection of *Recommendations* is a compendium of our research and practical action. The following paper by lecturer Toshinori Yamada explores the role of the “humanitarian approach” and future challenges, from the perspective of what we must do to expedite nuclear disarmament and abolish nuclear weapons. The third paper, by Professor Yoshiro Matsui, examines the Shimoda Case decision, which was the world’s first judicial decision on the use of nuclear weapons and ruled that the atomic bombings violated international law, by placing it in the context of the historical development of international humanitarian law. The fourth paper, by lawyer Masayoshi Naito, describes the No More Hibakkusha Lawsuits, which found that if nuclear weapons are used again, it will be impossible to deal with the result. Finally there is the paper by lawyer Ken’ichi Okubo, who calls for us to give up nuclear energy. His argument is based on the experience and lessons of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident from 2010 through 2015. Lawyers Kazue Mori, Jun Sasamoto, and Yui Kayano offer critical comments. Mori writes about the model bill for an Anti-Nuclear Weapons Law which was produced and is under consideration by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations; Sasamoto discusses the relationship between the right to peace and the challenge of abolishing nuclear weapons; and Kayano offers an appeal, as a junior lawyer, for the abolition of nuclear weapons. I definitely want my American friends, and all the people who have gathered here in New York from around the world, to read this collection of *Recommendations*. And finally I’ll say it once more: Please come to Hiroshima.