No More Nagasakis

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IN 1961, JOHN F. KENNEDY WARNED that “Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.”

In February 1981, discussing the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs during his first visit to Japan, Pope John Paul II appealed for the abolition of nuclear weapons. “War is the work of man,” he said. “War is destruction of human life. War is death.”

Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind. Seventy-two years ago, nuclear weapons, weapons of the ultimate evil, were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

On July 7, 2017, the United Nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons after a long and strenuous effort. On September 20, the treaty was opened for signature.

Although countries that possess nuclear weapons and countries that depend on their “nuclear umbrella” have criticized the treaty for its ineffectiveness, it is a great achievement that a global norm has been established as a starting point for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Yes, we, the survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are hoping that the treaty will go into force with the ratification of many countries.

I was born on March 9, 1936.

I spent my childhood under Japan’s wartime regime. I was indoctrinated to believe that Japan, a country of gods, could not possibly be defeated in war.

I learned to despise Koreans and Chinese people, whose deployment for hard labor I took for granted. I learned the slogan “Kichiku Bei Ei” – “The US and the UK are monsters and beasts.” We practiced piercing dolls that were made to look like Americans with bamboo spears.

While hiding in bomb shelters to escape air raids, however, I gradually began to suspect that Japan’s defeat might be imminent.

The bombing of Hiroshima City took place on August 6, 1945, at 3:00 p.m. On August 9, at 11:02 a.m., the United States dropped a plutonium atomic bomb over Nagasaki City.
The bomb exploded 500 meters above Urakami, a northern district of the city, and instantly turned Nagasaki into hell on earth. The wind beneath the mushroom clouds was estimated to be 10,000 degrees C. The city was a scene of unimaginable devastation.

Seventy-four thousand people were killed indiscriminately, including Japanese citizens, Chinese people who had been arrested and forcibly brought to Japan, Korean people who had been forcibly mobilized as laborers, and American prisoners of war. Seventy-five thousand people were injured.

It was not just humans that were killed. Insects, birds, dogs, cats, cows, horses, and other animals lost their lives, along with plants and all other living things.

I was nine years old at the time. I happened to be deep in the mountains, 6.5 kilometers away from the hypocenter, and was spared from the direct effects of the bombing.

Beginning on the day after the bombing, however, my mother, sister, and brothers assisted with rescue work and the cremation of bodies. They soon died, one after another, from what later would become known as “atomic bomb diseases.” But first they endured unimaginable suffering, including bleeding from their gums, hair loss, and fatigue.

We, atomic bomb survivors, do not accept the common justifications for the fact that two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It could have not been simply due to the United States’ need to retaliate against Japan, or the need to end the war without causing further casualties.

We suspect that in fact the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an experiment into the destructive power of atomic bombs on cities and human lives, as well as an attempt to establish hegemony in the world.

Please allow me to discuss the damage caused by the bombing of Nagasaki.

On May 27, 2016, Barack Obama visited Hiroshima for the first time as president of the United States, and we hibakusha [bombing survivors] welcomed him.

Seven years earlier, in April 2009, President Obama had visited Prague, where he clearly articulated his vision for pursuing a world without nuclear
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weapons, boldly declaring, “As a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act.” For this offer of hope, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In Hiroshima, however, President Obama began his 17-minute speech, ostensibly to mark “the start of our own moral awakening,” with the following line: “Seventy-one years ago, on a bright cloudless morning, death fell from the sky and the world was changed.”

This poetic language caused anger among survivors, who had experienced hell under the atomic clouds and were still living with the fear of aftereffects, and late-onset effects, and the possible dangers to their children and grandchildren.

Nevertheless, it is important to recall that the two cities destroyed by the bombings were rebuilt with international support, including support from the United States. And that there are various mutual efforts to foster world peace and stability.

If we take seriously the role Japan ought to play today, we should sincerely embrace our pioneer status, and accept the responsibility to realize President Obama’s call not to repeat the history of war waged in the name of civilization, not to “justify violence in the name of some higher cause,” not to let “the memory of the morning of August 6, 1945 . . . fade,” and to devote ourselves to the pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons.

When we hibakusha talk of nuclear weapons as “absolute evil,” we always remind ourselves not to forget the history of Japan’s cruel aggression during the Sino-Japan War and World War II, and to express our remorse and apology.

Japan deeply regrets its recent past. The country adopted and has maintained a constitution that has served as a model for those interested in world peace.

Today, how do people in the world regard the Japanese government’s commitment to the constitution’s “three non-nuclear principles,” or its determination to “realize the abolition of nuclear weapons and engage in active pacifism?”

Japan maintains a strong military force and is rushing to become a world power. It has adopted a state secret law and a conspiracy law, and has revised laws related to national security.
The prime minister is seeking to amend the constitution [to validate the existence of the Japan Self-Defense Force]. Rather than establishing a nuclear-free zone in Northeast Asia, I wonder if the current policy is inhibiting the development of peace, and of friendship with neighboring countries.

As long as scientific progress does not contribute to the happiness of mankind, as long as the monopoly of resources and the gap between rich and poor are expanding, the world will become more and more unstable. If each country only pursues its own interests, only a handful of countries will survive.

I believe that the fruit of scientific progress should be shared for the happiness of mankind.

In noting the suffering of atomic bomb survivors, the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons bars not only the development, testing, production, possession, and use of atomic bombs, but also the threats of their use.

It also includes the obligations for providing relief for victims of nuclear weapons and for instituting sustained educational efforts to promote the vision of a nuclear-free world.

The treaty leaves open its door to countries that possess nuclear weapons and countries that are protected under nuclear umbrellas. But I do not think achieving its goals will be easy.

We should recognize that the effort to neutralize the world's 14,900 nuclear weapons just has begun.

We, atomic bomb survivors, share the suffering of the people of Okinawa, and of the victims of the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident.

The people of Okinawa continue to live a wartime life 72 years after the end of the Asia-Pacific War, because Okinawa is not yet a place truly under Japanese rule.

“Atoms for Peace,” a speech delivered by President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the United Nations General Assembly on December 8, 1953, was aimed at stopping the endless competition for developing atomic bombs.

But it is also true that it has created a world exposed to the risks and fears of explosions at nuclear power plants, and to a chain of accidents from Sellafield in the UK, Three Mile Island in the USA, Chernobyl in the USSR, and Fukushima Daiichi on March 11, 2011.
The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has not yet been contained and it will be nearly impossible for the risks it poses to be totally removed.

Nevertheless, the Japanese government is in a hurry to restart nuclear power plants. It has signed a technical cooperation agreement for nuclear energy with India, and is also actively promoting the export of Japanese nuclear power technologies.

In addition, Japan has 48 tons of plutonium which can be used in nuclear warheads, and which the Japanese government regards as a “potential nuclear deterrent.”

We hibakusha insist that humankind cannot coexist with nuclear technologies. We strongly oppose the construction and restarting of nuclear power plants and related facilities and will continue to seek the abolition of all such plants.

We are convinced that military force cannot protect peace. We insist on the importance of “human security.”

Nine countries possess as many as 14,900 nuclear weapons, with intimidating power and destructive force that are not comparable to the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

If these weapons are mistakenly used, I believe that the earth is in danger of total destruction. Our historical mission is to appeal for, and to realize, an earth without nuclear weapons or war for the next generation!

We are appealing to the world from Nagasaki.

The activities of Nagasaki’s High School Student Peace Ambassadors for the last 20 years represent the power of young people who have embraced their responsibilities to carry the torch of peace.

In September 2015, we built a monument for 73 prisoners of war from the United States, the UK, the Netherlands, and Australia who had been mobilized as forced labor and were killed in the bombing of Nagasaki. The monument was built with support from private citizens, and we have held a memorial event each year.

The U.S. military attempted to drop relief supplies four times with B-29 bombers for about a month before the prisoners were released and returned to their homelands.
One of the planes crashed while trying to make it through a thick fog. The lives of 13 people were lost in the crash, but one was saved with the cooperation of local citizens.

We also built a memorial for these victims and started an exchange with their families.

The world’s first indiscriminate bombing took place in Guernica, Spain. Picasso’s portable mural, “Guernica,” is well-known. Since 2012, there has been an exchange between air strike victims in Guernica and atomic bomb victims in Nagasaki. On April 26 of that year, the anniversary of the bombing, we signed an agreement to “Walk Along the Path Toward Peace Together” in the presence of the mayor of the city of Lumo.

This agreement consists of four commitments:

• To oppose any military strikes or wars that sacrifice civilian lives;
• To pursue the elimination of nuclear weapons;
• To organize activities to spread appreciation for peace; and
• To take joint action to pass on these commitments to future generations.

On April 26, 2013, this evolved into a broader agreement signed by associations of war victims in five cities in three countries, including an association of war victims in Dresden, Germany; an association of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima; and an association of air strike victims in Tsuchizaki, Akita, the last Japanese city to suffer an air strike before World War II ended.

On April 26, 2017, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the air strike of Guernica, a 28-member peace delegation from Nagasaki, including the Archbishop of Nagasaki and me, visited Guernica. The delegation participated in a peace ceremony and donated a “Kids Guernica” peace mural created by children in Nagasaki. We discussed a plan of action for expanding the agreement for cooperation.

The mayor of Nagasaki is leading efforts to advance Nagasaki’s mission to propagate peace. He is currently serving as vice chair of “Mayors for Peace,” an international movement including 7,417 municipalities from 162 countries and regions around the world.

Two hundred eleven U.S. municipalities, including the City of Rochester, which signed on in March 2004, have joined the movement so far. The
City of Ithaca has not yet joined [editor's note: Ithaca joined in November 2017]. In addition, the mayor of Nagasaki is serving as the president of the National Council of Japan Nuclear-Free Authorities, of which 322 municipalities are members. A total of 1,619 municipalities (about 90.5% of Japan’s municipalities) have declared themselves to be nuclear-free.

The Nagasaki Foundation for the Promotion of Peace is part of a collaborative public-private effort to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons and the advancement of peace.

In 1974, leaders from Shinto, Buddhist, Christian, and other religious organizations in Nagasaki Prefecture transcended their doctrinal differences to agree on the common goals to eliminate nuclear weapons and pursue peace. For the last 45 years, we have held a memorial ceremony, “Prayers for Peace in Memory of the Victims of the Atomic Bombing,” at the hypocenter of the bombing of 1945.

In April 2012, Nagasaki University, a state university in the City of Nagasaki, established the Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, one of a few research centers devoted to the abolition of nuclear weapons in the world. The center has been actively disseminating results of expert research and transmitting information related to efforts to abolish nuclear weapons in order to inspire awareness among citizens.

In addition, the university has discouraged its faculty and staff from seeking grants from the Japanese government’s National Security Technology Research Promotion Fund and has maintained its policy not to enter into contracts with this fund. The university has expressed concerns about the possibility that academic research funded by this program may be applied for military purposes.

An international campaign to collect signatures to support the abolition of nuclear weapons is also underway.

More than 50 “Kids Guernica” peace murals, whose size (3.5 meters x 7.8 meters) is identical to that of Picasso’s giant painting, have been produced in Nagasaki and have traveled around the world as messengers of peace.

Finally, I would like to mention three sad events that took place just before I arrived here. On August 30, [2017], Mr. Sumiteru Taniguchi, chairperson of the Federation of Associations of Survivors of Atomic Bombing in
Japan, passed away. He literally embodied radiation exposure from atomic bombing.

On September 2, Mr. Hideo Tsuchiyama, past president of the University of Nagasaki and an honorary citizen of Nagasaki, followed Mr. Taniguchi.

On September 3, North Korea audaciously proceeded with its sixth nuclear weapons test. My colleagues and I sent a letter of protest to the leader of North Korea in which we expressed our outrage and requested a total ban on nuclear weapons.

However, we, the citizens of Nagasaki, are determined to overcome our sadness and anger and continue to seek to realize world peace.

We will march toward a future in which no nuclear weapons remain, and a future in which renewable energy has replaced nuclear energy and we no longer fear nuclear power plant accidents.

Nagasaki must be the last.

Thank you very much.