A tribute to the Hibakusha

Angela Kane
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the Delegates of the NPT: A photographic exhibit by Nihon Hidankyo

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Ambassador Yoshikawa, distinguished visitors and guests,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to take part in this special event, and to personally honour the Hibakusha, who have traveled so far to attend the 2015 NPT Review Conference. I am always moved by the Hibakusha’s resolve to pursue a world without nuclear weapons and by their indefatigable efforts to spread their message of peace and disarmament across the globe.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the Hibakushas assembled here today for bringing your important message directly to the delegates of this conference.

Seventy years ago, atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Over two hundred thousand people perished. Your cities were utterly devastated. You are the survivors. You lived through the greatest man-made disasters in history. You were forced to bear witness to unspeakable tragedies. You lost families. You lost relatives, friends, communities.

And your struggle did not end with the explosions. The bombs were dropped in 1945 and yet hundreds of thousands of Hibakusha continued to suffer from the debilitating effects of ionizing radiation. Ten years after the bombings, two hundred thousand Hibakushas died from a sudden outbreak of leukemia. It was this outbreak that claimed the life of Sadako Sasaki, the twelve year-old girl whose origami cranes became a symbol of the tragedy of the Hibakushas but, more importantly, they became a symbol of peace.

It is with deep sadness that even today, we must witness the continued suffering of the Hibakusha. Hundreds of Hibakushas suffer the ravages of myelodysplastic syndrome, or MDS, and are now fighting a second of wave of leukemia caused by the radiation. Let us remember the words of Hibakusha, Takako Yoshida, who, before dying of MDS, said, “The atomic bomb is still in my body.”

Yet, somehow, despite your suffering, you, the Hibakusha, have risen above your personal tragedies to take up a cause of the highest importance: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of nuclear weapons. For the past seven decades you have carried out this mission selflessly and single-mindedly, defying the damage these terrible weapons have done to you, and overcoming the growing complacency and apathy among younger generations.

Thanks to these tireless efforts, your memories and dreams are shared by millions of people. Atomic bombs set Hiroshima and Nagasaki ablaze. But they also ignited eternal flame in the hearts of Hibakushas. This flame has, in turn, illuminated the hearts of millions and will inspire generations to come. It will continue to shine a spotlight on the world’s conscience until the day when nuclear weapons are eliminated from this planet.

During his visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 2013, American movie director Oliver Stone noted, “If we don’t remember Hiroshima, then we will lose our humanity. We will lose our civilization. We must never forget the past.” I believe that this is the primary mission of the Hibakusha: to keep us civilized and to save our humanity.
We are honoured by your presence here today. We are all touched by your resolve to deliver your message to delegates to the NPT Review Conference. We pledge to carry on your mission by preserving your important memories and passing the torch of nuclear disarmament to succeeding generations.

You were faced with unimaginable horrors and you survived. But more than that, you never lost hope. This is your legacy; this is the tribute you give to those that perished.

Ladies and gentleman,

Please join me in paying tribute to the Hibakusha, here and around the world, and honoring their work and achievements over the past 70 years.

Thank you very much.