



Hibakusha and Fukushima

Terumi Tanaka

*The author helped found
the Japan Confederation
of Atomic and Hydrogen
Bomb Sufferers'
Organizations (Nihon
Hidankyo).*

I was 13 years old when an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, on 9 August 1945. At the time, I was reading a book on the second floor of my house, which was 3.2 km from the epicentre. The bomb killed five of my relatives. Although I have endured various kinds of suffering, I have managed to live to this day. Today, with other *Hibakusha* around the country, I am fighting together for a world free of nuclear weapons and for state compensation for A-bomb survivors.

On 11 March, a great earthquake hit eastern Japan, causing a massive tsunami devastating many cities and towns on the Pacific coast. The tsunami-ruined cities reminded *Hibakusha* of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 66 years ago. We were shocked and saddened as we thought of people who lost their family members and homes, as well as those who were killed in the disaster.

At the time, all four reactors at the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant lost off-site power, which led to the disfunctioning of the cooling system. Over the next few days, several hydrogen explosions occurred, releasing radioactive materials into the atmosphere. They were carried far and wide by the wind to the Kanto region. Fall-out landed on the ground with rain contaminating vast areas.

Residents living near the crippled nuclear power plant and many other people in wider areas were left without the necessary information about radioactive elements spreading around the region. This is why I can say many people must have been exposed to radiation, or inhaled

radioactive materials resulting in internal radiation exposure.

This fact was long kept from public knowledge. The utility and the government must be condemned for withholding it. The government said, 'There are no immediate health risks'. Doctors and scientists repeatedly insisted there is nothing to worry about, and did not provide any details. This gave rise to a sense of distrust among the public.

We, *Hibakusha*, have never imagined a massive emergence of more *Hibakusha* in Japan, the only A-bombed country. We have long called for no more *Hibakusha* to be created as a result of the use of nuclear weapons. We have worked hard to develop the movement to this end. So I deeply regret that such a large number of radiation victims have again been created in this country.

Damage from radiation exposure at Fukushima Daiichi is not the same as that of the atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Unlike *Hibakusha* who were proximally exposed to initial radiation (mainly neutron radiation and gamma rays), those who were more distally exposed *Hibakusha*, or *Hibakusha* who entered Hiroshima or Nagasaki to rescue victims after the bomb explosion, were in a similar situation to the *Hibakusha* in Fukushima. Those *Hibakusha* may not suffer massive doses of radiation entailing serious acute symptoms.

However, due to damage to their genes, the distally exposed *Hibakusha* could suffer from diseases such as cancer in five or ten years, or even 30 years later. Sixty-six years after the A-bomb was dropped, damage from radiation exposure still torments *Hibakusha*. *Hibakusha* from the Fukushima nuclear accident also experience such risks. The government and the power plant operator, TEPCO, should have made known this fact at an early stage and explained how to reduce these risks, and how to realize this goal while at the same time decreasing negative impacts on our health caused by the changes in our lives. However, TEPCO and the government covered up the fact, and experts in the media did not provide appropriate explanations and advice to the public. They said it is important to protect children, who live longer than adults and are susceptible to radiation. However, explanation about how infants absorb radiation into their thyroid was inadequate. Also, inappropriate explanations about caesium contamination in playgrounds raised concerns among parents.

I feel deep sympathy for *Hibakusha* created by the Fukushima accident and other recent *Hibakusha* elsewhere, who are forced to endure the same pain that A-bomb *Hibakusha* and global *Hibakusha* went through. I thought I would like to share their suffering. This is why we started our efforts to hold TEPCO and the government accountable for what they have

done, including spreading the safety myth and causing massive suffering to the public, and also to demand compensation for damage to lives, health, mind and livelihood.

A-bomb survivors were left without proper support for twelve years after the bomb was dropped in 1945. In order to avoid making their bitter experience useless, in April, *Nihon Hidankyo* called on the government, TEPCO and the Fukushima Prefectural Government to take the following measures: the immediate issuance of disaster-victim certificates and health books to record what the victims have done after March 11, and the introduction of medical check-ups twice a year. The costs should be paid by the government. For many years to come, the government should be responsible for the health of radiation victims. If they fail to do this, whatever the government says, people's distrust and fear will only increase.

This year marks the 55th anniversary of *Nihon Hidankyo*, and the 66th year since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ten-year gap between the two events is due to the US policy of concealing the damage caused by the A-bombings, and the failure of the Japanese government to provide the sufferers with proper support. Due to these cover-ups and negligence, people paid no attention to the *Hibakusha* during that period. They were neglected and isolated from the general public around the country, suffering from unknown A-bomb diseases, which took many of their lives.

When the United States carried out a hydrogen bomb test explosion at Bikini Atoll, on 1 March 1954, the crew of a Japanese tuna fishing boat were showered with nuclear fall-out. Mr. Kuboyama, the ship's radio operator, died. This touched off the movement against atomic and hydrogen bombs throughout Japan. Encouraged and supported by the movement against A and H Bombs, *Hibakusha* who had participated in the 2nd World Conference against A and H Bombs, in 1956, founded the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers' Organizations (*Nihon Hidankyo*).

With *Hibakusha* increasing their struggle in close co-operation with their supporters, the Act for Atomic Bomb Sufferers' Medical Care was enacted in 1957, and the Special Measures Act for Atomic Bomb Sufferers in 1968. As a result of our strenuous effort over the last 55 years, demanding that the government issue A-Bomb Victim Health Insurance to *Hibakusha*, and that it pay state compensation, including for A-bomb deaths, the government has now the legal duty to pay premiums for all the A-Bomb Victim Health Insurance holders. More than 90 per cent of

Hibakusha can get some sort of benefits.

The major problem that had been left out of the aid and relief for *Hibakusha* was recognition that they have diseases caused by A-bomb radiation exposure. There was a system to provide sufficient care if one has illnesses recognized as radiation-related. But in those days, the number of those recognized as having A-bomb-related diseases was just 2,000 out of 300,000 *Hibakusha*. Even though the government lost Ms. Matsuya Hideko's lawsuit in the supreme court, it tightened up the criteria for recognition, far from improving them.

A series of collective *Hibakusha* lawsuits have been effective in forcing the government to change its unjust policies. After filing a lawsuit in 2003, 306 plaintiffs at 17 district courts sought recognition of their illnesses as caused by the atomic bombings. They won lawsuits until August 2009, when *Hibakusha* and the government reached agreement on ending the collective lawsuits. They had the government twice improve the criteria for A-bomb disease recognition. In the last three years, the number of cases of *Hibakusha* being recognized as suffering from atomic bomb-related illnesses has increased to 7,000. This victory was made possible because the inhuman nature of the damage done by the atomic bombings was widely exposed, as well as the fact of internal radiation exposure caused by radioactive fall-out, and because the movement has won broad support from the general public aspiring for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

But the government still refuses to recognize the diseases and exposure that have duly been recognized by the court decisions. There is a wide gap in judgment between courts and the government. We will continue to demand that further improvements be made to the criteria to bridge the gap.

Given the fact that the government's policy is one of asking *Hibakusha* to endure their suffering, we cannot expect fundamental improvements in *Hibakusha* policy. We should win compensation for the dead, the pillar of state compensation, and replace it with new legislation that will make clear, in name and reality, that they are the victims born of war launched and carried out by the state. *Nihon Hidankyo* is determined to promote the campaign further. Without the support of the wide range of Japanese people, state compensation will not be realized. I often hear people say, 'That's impossible'. But I believe this is a problem not only for *Hibakusha*, but for the Japanese people in general. With these aspirations, we will fight on to win a victory with the support of as many people as possible.

Finally, let me speak about energy policy based on nuclear power. *Nihon Hidankyo* has great concerns over the use of nuclear energy for power

generation, and has called for a shift away from energy policy dependent on nuclear power. The recent nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant produced a lot of radiation victims. Nevertheless, the utility and the government are unable to bring the accidents under control. They can neither deal with nor control spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste. In concluding my report as a *Hibakusha*, I am pleased to tell you that we, the *Hibakusha*, have decided to demand that the government and all the power companies should break away from the energy policy based on nuclear power, stop building new nuclear power plants, and shut down and decommission existing nuclear reactors one by one.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

Alan McLean
President


The Fire Brigades Union

**HANDS OFF PUBLIC
SECTOR PENSIONS**



www.fbu.org.uk