

Visit Hiroshima and act

Kazumi Matsui

The Mayor of Hiroshima read this Peace Declaration on 6 August 2020 at a ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of his city.

On August 6, 1945, a single atomic bomb destroyed our city. Rumour at the time had it that ‘nothing will grow here for 75 years’. And yet, Hiroshima recovered, becoming a symbol of peace visited by millions from around the world.

Humanity struggles now against a new threat: the novel coronavirus. However, with what we have learned from the tragedies of the past, we should be able to overcome this threat. When the 1918 flu pandemic attacked a century ago, it took tens of millions of lives and terrorized the world because nations fighting World War One were unable to meet the threat together. A subsequent upsurge in nationalism led to World War Two and the atomic bombings. We must never allow this painful past to repeat itself. Civil society must reject self-centred nationalism and unite against all threats.

The day after the atomic bombing, a young boy of 13 saw ‘... victims lying in rows on the bridge. Many were injured. Many had breathed their last. Most were burned, their skin hanging off. Many were begging, “Water! Give me water!”’ Long after that horrifying experience, the man asserts, ‘fighting happens when people think only of themselves or their own countries’.

Last November, when Pope Francis visited our city, he left us with a powerful message: ‘To remember, to journey together, to protect. These are three moral imperatives.’

Ogata Sadako, as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, worked passionately to assist those in need. She spoke from experience when she said, ‘The

important thing is to save the lives of those who are suffering. No country can live in peace alone. The world is connected.’

These messages urge us to unite against threats to humanity and avoid repeating our tragic past.

Hiroshima is what it is today because our predecessors cared about each other; they stood together through their ordeal. Visitors from other countries leave the Peace Memorial Museum with comments like, ‘now we see this tragedy as our own,’ and ‘this is a lesson for the future of humanity’. Hiroshima considers it our duty to build in civil society a consensus that the people of the world must unite to achieve nuclear weapons abolition and lasting world peace.

Turning to the United Nations, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which went into effect 50 years ago, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) adopted three years ago, are both critical to eliminating nuclear weapons. They comprise a framework that we must pass on to future generations, yet their future is opaque. Now more than ever, world leaders must strengthen their determination to make this framework function effectively.

That is precisely why I urge them to visit Hiroshima and deepen their understanding of the atomic bombing. I further urge them to invest fully in the NPT Review Conference. They must negotiate in good faith towards nuclear disarmament, as stipulated by the NPT, and continue constructive dialogue toward a security system free from reliance on nuclear weapons.

To enhance its role as mediator between the nuclear weapon and non-nuclear weapon states, I ask the Japanese government to heed the appeal of the *hibakusha* that it sign and ratify, and become a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As the only nation to suffer a nuclear attack, Japan must persuade the global public to unite with the spirit of Hiroshima. I further demand more generous assistance for the *hibakusha*, whose average age exceeds 83, and the many others whose daily lives are still plagued by suffering due to the harmful effects of radiation on their minds and bodies. And once more, I demand the political decision to expand the ‘black rain areas’.

At this Peace Memorial Ceremony marking 75 years since the bombing, we offer heartfelt prayers for the peaceful repose of the souls of the atomic bomb victims. Together with Nagasaki and likeminded people around the world, we pledge to do everything in our power to abolish nuclear weapons and open a path to genuine and lasting world peace.