



**ICAN** 2017  
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24 June 2020

His Excellency Shinzō Abe  
Prime Minister of Japan

Dear Prime Minister Abe:

As you are well aware, this August will mark 75 years since the United States used the world's first nuclear weapons to obliterate the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than a quarter of a million people. I am writing to you as a Hiroshima hibakusha and an active member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 2017 Nobel Peace Laureate. To commemorate the 75th anniversaries, I have written to all the heads of state and government across the world, asking them to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Of course, I ask the same of Japan, the only country to have ever suffered from the use of nuclear weapons in war.

It is unfortunate that you were too busy to meet me in person when I was in Tokyo last October for the enthronement of the new Emperor. I do look forward to meeting you to discuss Japan's necessary leadership in eliminating nuclear weapons, as I have an intimate knowledge of the effects of radioactive violence.

As a 13-year-old schoolgirl, I witnessed my city of Hiroshima blinded by the flash, flattened by the hurricane-like blast, incinerated in the heat of 4,000 degrees Celsius and contaminated by the radiation of one atomic bomb. A bright summer morning turned to dark twilight with smoke and dust rising in the mushroom cloud, dead and injured covering the ground, begging desperately for water and receiving no medical care at all. The spreading firestorm and the foul stench of burnt flesh filled the air.

Miraculously, I was rescued from the rubble of a collapsed building, about 1.8 kilometres from ground zero. Most of my classmates in the same room were burned to death alive. I can still hear their voices calling their mothers and God for help. As I escaped with two other surviving girls we saw a procession of ghostly figures slowly shuffling from the centre of the city. Grotesquely wounded people, whose clothes were tattered, or who were made naked by the blast. They were bleeding, burnt, blackened and swollen. Parts of their bodies were missing, flesh and skin hanging from their bones, some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands, and some with their stomachs burst open, with their intestines hanging out.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, many thousands more would die, often in random and mysterious ways, from the delayed effects of radiation. Still to this day, radiation is killing survivors. Every person who died had a name. Every person was loved by someone.

In our struggle for survival, rebuilding our lives out of the ashes, we hibakusha became convinced that no human being should ever have to repeat our experience of the inhumane, immoral, and cruel atomic bombing, and that our mission is to warn the world about the reality of nuclear dangers and to help people understand the ultimate evil of nuclear weapons. We have a moral imperative to abolish nuclear arsenals, before they are used again, by accident or by design. With this conviction we have been speaking out around the world for more than seven decades for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

Prime Minister Abe, as the leader of the only nation that has experienced the hellfire of nuclear war, I call on you to take a real step towards the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Atomic bomb survivors are greatly disturbed that the government of Japan, having failed to participate in the negotiations towards the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, is now refusing to sign and ratify this treaty. As one of the hibakusha who has continued to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons for more than 70 years, I feel personally betrayed. The fact that the Japanese government shamefully continues to state publicly that nuclear weapons are necessary for its own security undermines all efforts being made for their elimination. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

The government of Japan states that it will “bridge the gap” for nuclear disarmament. Yet, your administration refuses to even acknowledge the value of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and appears to speak instead on behalf of the position of the nuclear-armed states. Tragically, the Japanese government seems to be an accomplice to these nuclear-armed nations. This stance represents a dreadful defiance against Japanese public opinion, and has the potential to destroy Japan’s credibility in the international community. Japan must be aware of its historical, global and moral responsibility, and break with its policy of dependence on nuclear weapons. Japan must reflect on the catastrophic harm that nuclear weapons inflict and commit to eliminate them as a matter of urgency.

Prime Minister Abe, if you declare, on the 75th anniversaries of the atomic bombings, that you will change Japan’s policy and work towards the signing and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, this will be etched in the history of Japan and of the world as your greatest legacy.

On behalf of the victims and survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as all who have been affected by nuclear testing, particularly indigenous people across the world, I urge you to take meaningful, effective action.

Sincerely yours,



Setsuko Thurlow (Ms.)  
International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons