

City Mayors on the March

Hiroshima Leading Citizen Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons

by Tadatoshi Akiba

Based on our tragic experience 58 years ago, Hiroshima has continually called for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of genuine and lasting world peace. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, this planet still bristles with enormous arsenals of nuclear weapons, and today we face an increasingly perilous nuclear crisis.

We see States that have nuclear weapons taking more rigid positions regarding disarmament, and non-nuclear-weapon States frightened into seeking their own nuclear bombs. The global Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the pivotal international agreement regarding nuclear weapons, is teetering on the brink of collapse. The world's leading superpower, the United States, for example, has refused to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and is resuming research into small nuclear weapons. These steps run contrary to the enshrined commitment of nuclear powers to reduce atomic arsenals and move toward a nuclear-weapon free world.

We cannot sit quietly as the world plunges toward unspeakable violence and misery. We must let our leaders know, first and foremost, that we demand immediate freedom from the nuclear threat. Nuclear weapons are heinous, cruel, inhumane weapons that threaten our entire species. In 1996, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion declaring them illegal.

Accordingly, I attended the Meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) to the 2005 NPT Review Conference held in April 2003 in Geneva. There, as president of the World Conference of Mayors for Peace, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that now has 554 member cities in 107 countries and regions, I made the following demands, among others:

- ▶ A complete and total ban on all nuclear weapons everywhere;
- ▶ Removal of all nuclear weapons from hair-trigger alert immediately and withdrawal of all nuclear weapons deployed on foreign territory;



An illustration from the children's book, "*Hiroshima No Pika*" by Toshi Maruki which shows the yearly ritual of children floating paper lanterns down the river during the evening of August 6th.

Brightly colored lanterns, with victim's names written on them, are floated down rivers in the city by relatives to console the souls of atomic bomb victims. Most lanterns are set adrift in the Motoyasu River which flows in front of the A-bomb Dome.

- ▶ Nuclear disarmament—it is high time for all recognized nuclear-weapon States to join in a multilateral process of nuclear disarmament and for de-facto nuclear-weapon States to terminate their programs and join the NPT as non-nuclear States;
- ▶ Dismantlement and destruction of all nuclear weapons, with the radioactive material disposed of as quickly and as safely as possible, with concomitant dismantling of all dedicated delivery systems, production facilities, test sites, and research laboratories;

► **Global Verification**—we demand that all nations throw their doors unconditionally open to UN inspectors mandated to ensure that all nuclear weapons and all programs to make such weapons are accounted for and dismantled. All States should declare all relevant activities and make their own satellites and other national technical means available to those inspectors. Citizen verification should be supported by domestic laws requiring publication of relevant information and granting of full legal protection to whistle-blowers.

These demands are essential steps for negotiations on a universal Nuclear Weapons Convention establishing a verifiable and irreversible regime for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons

To achieve this goal, I have begun working, primarily through the Mayors for Peace but in close cooperation with NGOs around the world, to design and implement an Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons. Our target date is 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombings.

First, we will mobilize a dozen or more members of the Mayors for Peace and hundreds of NGO representatives to attend the NPT PrepCom scheduled in 2004. This will lead to mobilizing hundreds of mayors and thousands of NGO reps to attend the NPT Review Conference in 2005. We intend to make sure that the national delegates negotiating the treaty feel the eyes of the people on them. To do this, we must increase membership in the Mayors for Peace and ask our members to participate fully in the campaign and lobby their national governments.

Between the 2004 PrepCom and the 2005 Review Conference, we will call on member cities to raise the profile of the anti-nuclear movement on Hiroshima and Nagasaki days (August 6 and 9) in 2004. Each city will be expected to implement its own citizen-oriented program, but we are also hoping to find a way to link them, perhaps through television or Internet simulcasts. We will appeal to the news media worldwide in an effort to appraise them of the current nuclear crisis and the urgent need for our campaign. We will work to enhance grassroots activities and will support anyone and everyone who supports the campaign. Hiroshima will approach politicians, religious leaders, scholars, authors, journalists, teachers, artists, athletes—anyone with leadership influence.

A Vision for the Human Family

“Impossible,” some will say. “The nuclear powers will never agree. The military industrial complex is too pow-

erful.” I have no illusions about what happens when the people seek to correct their rulers. It took a hundred years and a terribly bloody war to free the slaves in the US, then another century to free them from the terror of lynchings and the humiliation of segregation. It took 30 years for Gandhi to free India from British rule. It took 15 years to stop the Vietnam War. Nelson Mandela was in jail for 28 years. Bottom-up change takes time and great sacrifice, but, unfortunately, people of moral and spiritual vision must again take up the struggle.

The abolition of nuclear weapons is no less important and no less just than the abolition of slavery. We are not just fighting a technology or a weapon. We are fighting nuclear weapons in our own minds. We are fighting the very idea that anyone could, for any reason, unleash a nuclear holocaust. We are fighting the idea that a small group of powerful men should have the capacity to launch Armageddon. We are fighting the idea that we should spend trillions of dollars on military overkill while billions of us live in dire, life-threatening poverty.

Our immediate objective is the elimination of nuclear weapons, but our long-term vision is a “spiritual home for all people.” We need this planet to be filled not with weapons of mass destruction but with compassion. We need it to be a source of creativity and energy for our children and youth, a personal place of rest and comfort for all, young or old, male and female. In that spiritual home for all people grows a rich Forest of Memory, and the River of Reconciliation and Humanity flowing from that forest is plied by Reason, Conscience and Compassion, ships that sail ultimately to the Sea of Hope and the Future.

I want my children and grandchildren to gaze with yours at the sun setting over that Sea of Hope and know that, despite our conflicts and other serious problems, their world will not explode in terminal, radioactive violence. To achieve this simple and obvious objective, we must all do everything in our power to eliminate nuclear weapons and eliminate war altogether. Let us all commit ourselves wholeheartedly to accomplishing this by the time we turn this world over to our children.

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