Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation

August 2025

PEACE CULTURE 平和文化

Special Issue to commrmotate the 80th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombing in Hiroshima

※ This issue compiles contributed articles from the December 2023 issue to the June 2025 issue on the theme of humanitarian and humankind's approach toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Humanitarian Approach towards the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

Izumi Nakamitsu
United Nations Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

The concept of "humanitarian approaches to nuclear disarmament" has gained considerable traction over the past decade. At the same time, the humanitarian approach has a long history in the field of disarmament, having been part of the foundations of disarmament and arms control agreements since the nineteenth century. The 1868 Saint Petersburg Declaration on explosive projectiles, for instance, referred to the necessity of "alleviating as much as possible the calamities of war." The Geneva Protocol, which opened for signature in 1925, made reference to a humanitarian imperative when it called for the banning of chemical and biological weapons on the ground that they had been "justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world."

More recently, the international community agreed on a Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (which, for a time, was colloquially referred to as the "inhumane weapons convention"). The Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention banned certain weapons considered by the international community to be inhumane by their very nature. The extension of this same logic and principle to nuclear weapons, as yet another compelling reason for their elimination, was the next step.

It was just over a decade ago, in 2013, that the first conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons took place in Oslo, Norway. Governments, international organizations and civil society came together to discuss and address the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. It was an overdue conversation, but one that had been called for since 1945 – the year nuclear weapons became part of our collective reality.

And yet, also since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons have been held up, by those who possess them, as the ultimate guarantor of the security of the State. At the same time, it has been clear that they can never be a guarantor of the security of the people – the citizens of those States. To the contrary, no adequate humanitarian response to any nuclear weapon detonation would be possible.

This has been well understood. And yet the primacy of the State in nuclear weapons policy has historically prevailed. Recently, however, there has been important shifts in this paradigm. Instead of a discussion that begins and ends in a State-centric context, humanitarian approaches to nuclear disarmament have placed emphasis on the lived experiences of the survivors of nuclear explosions.

This group includes both the victims of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and the stories of the *hibakusha*. It also includes those who have suffered from the multigenerational impacts of nuclear testing on affected communities and the environment. It is based on meticulous scientific research. In fact, such humanitarian approaches to nuclear disarmament can really be said to begin with the work of the *hibakusha* to tell their stories and raise awareness.

Diplomatic discourse has, as a result, benefited greatly from the inclusion of these considerations. They have made the arguments in favour of nuclear disarmament more compelling, more real, and more personal.

The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are catastrophic and indiscriminate, contained neither in time nor in space. The effects of a nuclear explosion in a populated area would unleash an unimaginable humanitarian and environmental catastrophe. No State can be adequately prepared to address what the International Committee of the Red Cross described as the "immediate humanitarian emergency nor the long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation in a populated area, nor provide appropriate assistance to those affected." (1)

And such effects would not respect national borders, instead spreading far beyond site of the detonation. As the tragic aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has shown, those that are exposed to a nuclear explosion but are not immediately killed are likely to suffer from grave, long-term health consequences. It is for these two reasons that nuclear disarmament remains the United Nations' highest disarmament priority.

It is for that reason, that I have been heartened by the changes in the legal landscape over the past decade, most notably in the form of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which was opened for signature in 2017 and entered into force in 2021. It is the first multilateral treaty to comprehensively ban all nuclear-weapons related activities and was the first new multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty of any sort in over two decades. It also has a clear focus on the victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons. Indeed, it owes its existence to, among others, the dedicated efforts and persistence of the *hibakusha*.

However, it is my firm view that discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons should not be confined to the TPNW's States Parties and its supporters. Like nuclear weapons themselves, this is an issue that affects all inhabitants of our planet. We all have a stake in pursuing meaningful and workable approaches to international peace and security that integrate human, national and common security – not just State security. Work related to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are a necessary part of that effort. This is, to say the least, an area of mutual concern, regardless of nationality or treaty-status.

Today, the world is currently facing multiple challenges. Geopolitical tensions are continuing to rise. Distrust has replaced dialogue. As a result, we are again facing a world of acute and daily nuclear risk, fueled by dangerous nuclear rhetoric. The guardrails we have erected – the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime – are under

(1) See www.icrc.org/en/document/humanitarian-impacts-and-risks-use-nuclear-weapons, accessed on 28 October 2024.

severe strain.

With the fast-approaching eightieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we have an important opportunity to remind ourselves of the existential risks posed by nuclear weapons. I remain thankful for the courage of the *hibakusha* in keeping the memory of those terrible events alive – courage that was recently recognized in the form of a Nobel Peace Prize. The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has pledged to keep the message of the *hibakusha* alive and continue to spread their message: we need nuclear disarmament now.

I recognize that this is not easy to do in times of tensions and insecurities. Yet it is precisely in such times that we should reaffirm our commitment to humanitarian disarmament and that we should amplify global efforts to protect civilians from the effects of nuclear war. In so doing, we should also reaffirm that nuclear war is not a niche disarmament issue or a peace and security issue that is out of our hands. It would have cataclysmic impacts on human lives, on the environment, on sustainable peace and on development. The ever-present threat posed by nuclear weapons casts a shadow over all that we do, and their elimination is therefore in all our interests.

I sincerely hope that Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies, will continue to convey the stark reality of the atomic bombings, clearly demonstrating the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons to people around the world and to civil society.

(October 2024)

The Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons underscore the Urgency for Nuclear Disarmament

Ambassador Alexander Kmentt
Director of the Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Department of the Austrian Foreign Ministry

At its core, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), also known as the nuclear ban treaty, makes the argument that the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are too grave and their risks too high for nuclear deterrence to be a sustainable basis for international security. This is underpinned by a growing body of new scientific evidence, which demonstrates how these consequences would be more global, cascading and catastrophic than previously understood. The same goes for the – increasing – complexity of risks associated with nuclear weapons. All States and peoples anywhere on Earth are at risk of becoming collateral damage in a multitude of ways of even a "limited" regional nuclear exchange. The Treaty's conclusion is, thus, that the nuclear deterrence security paradigm is not only highly precarious, fragile and not sustainable but also seriously affects and diminishes the security of non-nuclear states and, ultimately, all humanity. This concern is not only justified, given that global nuclear risks are on the rise, it also expresses a legitimate and evidence-based security perspective. TPNW supporters have highlighted this perspective countless times, in the treaty itself, though national or joint statements and in the declarations adopted at their First and Second Meetings of States Parties.

Nevertheless, the belief that nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence provide an "ultimate security guarantee" reigns supreme in nuclear armed states and many of their allies. This is the main reason that hinders actual progress toward nuclear disarmament and progress towards a world without nuclear weapons. If we actually want to see such progress, a paradigm shift is required and the discourse about nuclear weapons needs to change. It needs to move beyond the assumption of nuclear deterrence stability and that nuclear weapons will in the end not be used in a conflict to a critical and evidence-based challenge of these assumptions and the concrete consideration of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear deterrence failing.

This was the focus of the so-called Humanitarian Initiative, which was the precursor of the TPNW. It focussed on an international discussion of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons explosions and to assess in concrete terms and based on scientific evidence what happens when nuclear weapons are used and on the complexity of risks are associated with these weapons.

From 2012-2015, several international conferences took place dedicated to presenting new evidence on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and understanding the risks of these weapons. One particularly important element on the humanitarian consequences was the new evidence that even a so-called limited nuclear war – using a small fraction of today's arsenals – could lead to a nuclear winter. Huge amounts of soot would be transported by firestorms that would result from nuclear explosions into high layers of the atmosphere. This would disperse across the globe leading to a nuclear winter lasting several years with sig-nificant temperature drops in most moderate climate areas. Staple food production would be severely impacted global-ly. This new scientific research – a spin off from the climate change science – had a great impact. If a nuclear war be-tween two states in the northern hemisphere leads to a fam-ine in the southern hemisphere, say sub-Saharan Africa, this raises profound legal and ethical issues and questions about the legitimacy of the nuclear status quo.

Not only, is it impossible to appropriately address the immediate humanitarian emergency and long-term conse-

quences of nuclear weapon detonations, the new science highlighted that these consequences would be truly global. In short, this was new scientific evidence that the practice of nuclear deterrence – if it goes wrong even in a so-called "limited nuclear conflict" – means that all humanity and the world as a whole ends up as collateral damage in much more severe ways than previously understood.

Similarly, understanding the complexities of nuclear risks featured prominently in these conferences. Most states were shocked to learn historical cases that demonstrated how risky and vulnerable nuclear weapons system appeared to be and how often humanity escaped from nuclear disaster or accidents mostly through good fortune.

Maybe the most consequential aspect, however, was to give a voice to survivors of nuclear weapons use and testing. Hibakusha attended the conferences and gave witness accounts of their harrowing experiences. Victims of past nuclear testing campaigns, such as from the Pacific or from Kazakhstan did the same. This moved the discussion from being an abstract topic that is difficult to understand or imagine very much to a concrete human experiences. This new discussion about the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons generated enormous momentum among non-nuclear weapon states. By 2015, 159 States supported a joint statement in the UN expressing their deep concern about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. 138 States supported a Pledge that Austria had presented – to *"fill the legal gap for the prohibition of nuclear weapons (...) due to their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks"* and generated the momentum for the negotiation and adoption in 2017 in the United Nations on a ban treaty.

The TPNW is still a young treaty. As of this writing, 93 countries have signed the treaty, with 70 having ratified it. The ban treaty has already had a significant impact by giving voice to the majority of countries that are largely disenfranchised by the global nuclear order. The universalization of the TPNW and the debate on the prohibition of nuclear weapons are key objectives of the treaty. TPNW signatories, together with civil society organizations, will continue to pursue this goal gradually and steadily. This entails convincing more countries to join the treaty, as every ratification and signature of the TPNW strengthens its normative value on a global scale. At the same time, it is equally important to continue the promotion of the underlying rationale regarding the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons, which underscores the urgency of seeing progress on nuclear disarmament and moving away from the precarious nuclear deterrence paradigm.

The TPNW's multilateral effort points to an alternative approach to the problem of nuclear weapons and security. While it cannot coerce anyone to give up its nuclear weapons, the treaty can provide a convincing rationale for the lack of legitimacy, legality, and sustainability of nuclear weapons through strong arguments and evidence. The ban treaty can lay the groundwork for when nuclear-armed countries are ready to engage in concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament and away from the precarious nuclear deterrence paradigm.

When most nuclear developments point in the opposite direction of nuclear disarmament and the leadership of nuclear-armed countries on this issue has all but disappeared, the TPNW is an indispensable and potentially consequential ray of hope against an otherwise very bleak backdrop of currently failing leadership on nuclear disarmament.

(May 2024)

《The views expressed in this commentary are the author's and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Austrian Foreign Ministry.》

Profile

〔Alexander Kmentt〕

In his diplomatic career, Ambassador Kmentt has worked extensively on disarmament and non-proliferation issues in several functions in Vienna, Geneva and in the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization. From 2016-19, Kmentt served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Political and Security Committee of the EU. Kmentt is one of the architects of the initiative on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the TPNW. Kmentt chaired the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW.

A Wake-Up Call to Humanity

Melissa Parke
Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

Amid increasing global nuclear dangers, it is more important than ever that world leaders hear – and heed – the warnings of the *hibakusha*. Thus, the decision to award last year's Nobel Peace Prize to Nihon Hidankyo was not only well-deserved recognition of their decades of tireless and courageous work; it was also an urgent wake-up call.

Unless we change course now, the kind of devastation that was inflicted upon the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki eight decades ago will almost certainly be repeated.

As the Norwegian Nobel Committee observed last October, the "taboo" against the use of nuclear weapons "is under pressure".[1] Furthermore, proliferation risks abound, the nuclear arms race continues apace, and not a single nuclear-armed state has shown genuine commitment in recent years to the goal of nuclear disarmament.

Indeed, we appear to be sleepwalking towards catastrophe. As the *hibakusha* have warned time and again, in the starkest terms: "Nuclear weapons and humanity cannot co-exist."

But there is a glimmer of hope that an alternative path will be taken. Half of the world's countries have now accepted binding obligations under international law never to support nuclear weapons in any way. They have banded together to lay the legal and normative foundations for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

I am referring, of course, to the states parties and signatories to the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, or TPNW. The UN secretary-general, António Guterres, hailed this treaty's entry into force in 2021 as "an extraordinary achievement and a step towards the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons".[2]

Not only does it impose a blanket ban on nuclear weapons; it also establishes, for the first time, a legal framework for verifiably eliminating nuclear-weapon programmes in a time-bound matter, and includes novel provisions to assist victims of nuclear use and testing.

The preamble acknowledges "the unacceptable suffering of and harm caused to" the *hibakusha*, as well as their role – alongside civil society groups, the Red Cross, religious leaders and others – "in the furthering of the principles of humanity" by pursuing disarmament.

In fact, many *hibakusha* were instrumental in making the TPNW a reality. They addressed the negotiating conference in 2017 and the preceding conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Norway, Mexico and Austria. They collected signatures in the streets and raised public awareness about the urgent need for a ban.

When the final text of the treaty was adopted at the United Nations headquarters in New York, Setsuko Thurlow, a *hibakusha* from Hiroshima who has been a leading voice in our campaign since its inception, described that moment as "the beginning of the end of nuclear weapons".[3]

She asked the assembled diplomats and campaigners to "pause for a moment to feel the witness of those who perished in Hiroshima and Nagasaki … hundreds of thousands of people. Each person who died had a name. Each person was loved by someone."

For most of the world's governments, the need for a comprehensive prohibition on nuclear weapons was clear given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of their use. Anything less than an outright ban would have been inadequate.

The negotiations for the TPNW came about as a result of the deepening global awareness of these consequences. They followed the same approach as had been adopted for other inhumane weapons, such as chemical and biological weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions.

Thus, the discourse on humanitarian consequences served as an essential foundation for the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Our challenge now is to ensure that the TPNW achieves its high aims. We must work relentlessly to bring more countries on board. That includes, of course, Japan – and ultimately all nine of the countries currently armed with nuclear weapons.

Those that are not yet willing to accept the treaty's binding obligations should, at the very least, observe TPNW meetings to enhance their understanding of efforts to implement the treaty. They will also have the chance to share their views and expertise on important topics such as disarmament verification, safeguards and victim assistance.

Japan's voice in these diplomatic discussions would be especially meaningful as the only country to have suffered nuclear attacks in war.

But the ultimate goal must be for Japan and all other countries to join the treaty, not simply observe its meetings. As the TPNW states parties declared in 2022: "We will not rest until the last state has joined the treaty, the last warhead has been dismantled and destroyed, and nuclear weapons have been totally eliminated from the Earth."[4]

The states parties have also been unequivocal in their rejection of "nuclear deterrence" theory. In 2023, they stated: "The perpetuation and implementation of nuclear deterrence in military and security concepts, doctrines and policies not only erodes and contradicts non-proliferation, but also obstructs progress towards nuclear disarmament."[5]

They pledged not to "stand by as spectators to increasing nuclear risks and the dangerous perpetuation of nuclear deterrence".

No one is safer as a result of the existence of nuclear weapons. We are all infinitely less safe. These instruments of terror and mass destruction only contribute to enmity, fear, instability and unparalleled risk. They serve no useful or le-

1 https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2024/press-release/
2 https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf
3 https://hibakushastories.org/setsuko-thurlow-gives-final-remarks-at-ban-treaty-adoption/
4 https://undocs.org/en/TPNW/MSP/2022/6
5 https://undocs.org/TPNW/MSP/2023/14

gitimate purpose and must be abolished for everyone's sake, as a matter of urgency.

As Guterres said in 2022, "They offer no security – just carnage and chaos. Their elimination would be the greatest gift we could bestow on future generations."[6]

We have a duty to the world's children to do everything in our power to advance disarmament, including vehemently resisting all national policies and programmes that perpetuate nuclear dangers and burden future generations with this ultimate menace.

In the event of a nuclear attack against a city today, it is children who would suffer the greatest harm, as they are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of ionising radiation and more likely to sustain life-threatening burn and blast injuries. This fact alone should spur urgent action by all of the world's governments.

As we approach the 80th anniversaries of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we must reflect on their enormous human toll, including the death and suffering of tens of thousands of children. And we must rededicate ourselves to the cause of disarmament.

Weapons that are designed to kill and maim human beings on a massive scale, indiscriminately and across generations, have no place in our world.

(November 2024)

6 https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21492.doc.htm

Melissa Parke is the Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 "for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its groundbreaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons".

A Humanitarian and Humankind's Approach to the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Mitsuru Kurosawa

Professor Emeritus of Osaka University and Osaka Jogakuin University. Ph.D. of Law, Osaka University. Advisor to the Japanese delegation to the NPT Review Conference (1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015). First President of the Japan Association of Disarmament Studies (2009-2013).
Editor of "Nuclear Disarmament in the 21st Century: A Message from Hiroshima" (Hiroshima Peace Institute).

At the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), for the first time, the Final Document that achieved consensus among all countries included the so-called humanitarian approach, an approach to nuclear abolition for the sake of human survival, bearing in mind "the devastating inhumane consequences of nuclear weapons".

Subsequently, after the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons (2014) and the Conferences on Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (2013, 2014), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by a Majority of the world's nations on 7 July 2017.

1. What is "humanity"?

The TPNW is commonly referred in Japan as a humanitarian approach to nuclear abolition. Humanitarian means "to be in accordance with the path that we should follow as humans and to take such a standpoint." In the scope of this de inition, "humanity" is translated as "human nature" in Japan. Discussions on the TPNW in Japan are currently focused only on this aspect of "humanity".

However, the English word "humanity" contains another important meaning, that of "humankind". When discussing the issue internationally, one must adopt this de inition in order to be able to participate in the discussions and accurately understand the basic nature of the TPNW.

For example, the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, an extremely important document for nuclear weapons abolition, calls to us as human beings to forget about other things and always keep "humanity" in mind, as its most important message. This manifesto states that it is a question of choosing "not as a member of a particular nation, continent, or creed, but as a member of the human race, a species whose existence is in jeopardy," and that it is a question of "whether to bring about its extinction, or whether humankind will renounce war."

In this way, "humanity" has an important meaning of "humankind", and it should be understood also that the TPNW is a treaty that strengthens not only the humanitarian aspect but also the security of humankind. In this sense, what the TPNW advocates is "humanity" in the sense that it includes both meanings, and in terms of content, it should be interpreted as a humanitarian and humankind's approach.

The *hibakusha's* desire for peace, which is rooted in their atomic-bomb experience, transcends grief and hatred, and leads to a truly "humanitarian and humankind's approach", as they have called for nuclear abolition for the sake of human survival.

2. What is human security?

The term "security" is now used extremely broadly and is

frequently used to emphasize the importance of a concept, such as environmental security or economic security. The original definition of security is "how to respond to external threats," and historically and traditionally it has meant military security, and this remains a fundamental and central concept today.

Military security in the international community has traditionally been used in the sense of protecting one's own country against threats from other countries. This has been discussed as "national security". National security as a matter of military response, including war among nations, was the most important issue in international relations. When the League of Nations and the United Nations came into existence, the concept of "international security", or security among nations, was proposed. The primary objective of the United Nations is defined as "to maintain international peace and security."

The current vision of the TPNW is the "security of humanity". This goes beyond the security of individual nations and security among nations and aims to ensure the security of all peoples of the earth.

3. How should the TPNW be strengthened?

Nuclear weapons states and nuclear allies have expressed strong opposition to the TPNW, arguing that it undermines the NPT and seek to deny the very existence of the latter treaty. However, at the NPT Review Conference in August 2022, the draft final document of the conference specified the adoption, opening for signature, and entry into force of the TPNW, and the holding of the Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW. Although it was not formally adopted due to Russian opposition, it is believed that there was general agreement on the content of the TPNW.

In order to strengthen the TPNW, efforts should be made to increase the number of signatories and ratifying nations from the current status of 93 and 69, respectively, as of September 2023. In particular, the participation of states that are parties to the Treaty on a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and have not signed or ratified the TPNW should be encouraged, and the participation of the 122 countries that agreed to adopt the TPNW should be targeted. The TPNW and the NPT, while sharing the same basic recognition of the "humanitarian and humankind's approach", in other words, the inhumanity of the use of nuclear weapons, for the time being, we should lobby non-nuclear weapon states, to strengthen compatibility and complementarity.

4. What should the Japanese government do?

The Government of Japan is absolutely opposed to the TPNW and is also opposed to participating as observer in the Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty. Prime Minister Kishida cites the fact that "not a single nuclear-weapon state has joined" as the reason for this. He has also often stated that the Treaty is the exit for nuclear weapons abolition. If so, this end point should be pursued. Regarding observer participation in the Meeting of States Parties, since NATO members Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, which are in the same position as Japan, participated in the First Meeting of States Parties and are pursuing the possibility of cooperation, Japan can and should actively cooperate in areas such as assistance for the victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons.

(October 2023)

The Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in the Road toward 2045

Elayne Whyte-Gomez
Ambassador President of the United Nations negotiations of the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons
Professor of Practice, Johns Hopkins SAIS

Presiding over the United Nations diplomatic conference tasked with negotiating a legal ban on nuclear weapons was one of the greatest honors of my life, both as a diplomat representing Costa Rica and as a global citizen. The conference successfully met this immense responsibility. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, a groundbreaking achievement, was born in 2017, 72 years after the nuclear age began.

This treaty is the result of decades of relentless advocacy by individuals and organizations worldwide. It embodies the tireless efforts of diplomats in negotiating procedural, institutional, conceptual, and political frameworks to shape the narrative and build the political coalition necessary for a legally binding prohibition on nuclear weapons. This achievement stands as a testament to strategic vision, bravery, and political wisdom of political leaders and survivors of the atomic era. Beyond its historical and institutional significance, this conference was a transformative experience for all participants, one that will continue to shape our lives forever.

The most profound achievement occurred on July 7th, 2017, in Conference Room 1 of the United Nations building. On that day, survivors of nuclear weapons use, production, and testing witnessed a historic moment: a decisive majority of the international community cast a vote of categorical rejection of nuclear terror. This resounding vote called for a fundamental shift in nuclear policy, advocating for the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the only guarantee that they will never be used again under any circumstances.

We, people from diverse generations and walks of life, united in the belief that a legal prohibition on nuclear weapons was an act of justice for victims and a preventive measure toward achieving a world free from nuclear threats. We rejoiced to see survivors of atomic bombings and nuclear testing, finally find justice, recognition, and acknowledgment of their special assistance needs, from the international community.

In shaping this groundbreaking milestone, Hibakusha, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki stand as living testimonies to humanity's vulnerability and strength. My visits to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 2017 profoundly impacted my understanding of the human cost of nuclear weapons. Witnessing the resilience of survivors, the hibakusha, who rebuilt their lives and communities despite immense suffering, inspired me to believe that we could not fail in our mission. The mayor of Nagasaki urged me to convey the urgency of achieving a legal prohibition on nuclear weapons before more survivors perished. And so I did.

When diplomats, scientists, pacifists, humanitarian workers, lawyers, non-governmental organizations, and countless others called for a new paradigm in the global conversation on nuclear weapons, the hibakusha and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were at the forefront, offering firsthand evidence of the devastating consequences of nuclear weapons on humans, the environment, and socioeconomic structures. Their unwavering advocacy played a crucial role in shaping the strong belief and conviction that nuclear weapons should never be used again under any circumstances and must be abolished.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki never relinquished their dream of a better, more just, and secure world, working tirelessly to convey that vision through action, word, and day-by-day perseverance.

In 2020, as the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations commemorated its 75th anniversary. This sobering moment of reflection highlighted the dramatic changes that had occurred over the past seven decades and presented an opportunity for the organization to reevaluate its approach to global governance.

Building upon the lessons learned from both successes and failures, the upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024, will serve as a platform for global leaders to agree on a new roadmap for international cooperation. This includes the reaffirmation of the commitments towards security, arms control, and disarmament.

The timing couldn't be more strategic. According to scien-tific studies analyzed by the First Meeting of States Parties (MSP) of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, it is feasible to determine that the abolition of a nuclear ar-senal, even for the largest states, could be achieved within a decade. This decision, grounded in science and evidence, was reached at the First MSP.

However, it's challenging to write about hope in the face of current trends. Military buildup and expenditure have reached unprecedented levels, nuclear weapon arsenals are undergoing modernization and improvement, and the normative framework of international law and the nuclear taboo are being eroded by nuclear threats from Russia and a discourse that prioritizes war preparedness for security. The escalating great power competition and deteriorating securi-ty environment are a cause for grave concern for all citizens of the world and nations alike.

This is a moment in which we need to find strength, vision and inspiration. We need to drastically change course and humanity has the capacity to do so.

In that same line, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross highlighted in 2010 before the United Nations in Geneva, that "… the existence of nuclear weapons poses some of the most profound questions about the point at which the rights of States must yield to the interests of humanity, [and about] the capacity of our species to master the technology it creates…". In the same tone, in the message conveyed to the negotiation conference by Pope Francis on March 27th, 2017, he stressed the belief that Humanity "… has the freedom, intelligence, and capacity to lead and direct technology, to place limits on our power, and to put all this at the service of another type of progress: one that is more human, social and integral., and therefore, more conducive to structural peace."

This is the perspective that should guide the global conversation: not determinism, but human agency. In shaping the 21st-century discourse on security, peace, and disarmament, Hiroshima and Nagasaki — symbols of both humanity's vulnerability and resilience — serve as enduring reminders of the profound impact of nuclear weapons. As we approach 2045, marking the 100th anniversary of the nuclear era, these two cities, carrying the legacy of the Hibakusha, should lead the global dialogue on security and nuclear dis-armament, grounded in the harsh realities of the devastating human and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons.

(August 2024)

Initiatives by the International Committee of the Red Cross for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Shoko Hanzawa
Head of Delegation in Japan for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC's efforts to abolish nuclear weapons date back to 1945. On August 29, 1945, Fritz Bilfinger was the first foreign delegate of the ICRC to enter the A-bombed Hiroshima. The next day, he sent a telegram to the ICRC Delegation in Tokyo, informing them of the dire situation on the ground and requesting immediate assistance. In response, Marcel Junod, who had just arrived as Head of Delegation in Japan, formed a rescue team. Bilfinger's telegram read, "VISITED HIROSHIMA THIRTIETH CONDITIONS APPALLING STOP CITY WIPED OUT EIGHTY PERCENT ALL HOSPITALS DESTROYED OR SERIOUSLY DAMAGED INSPECTED TWO EMERGENCY HOSPITALS CONDITIONS BEYOND DESCRIPTION FULLSTOP EFFECT OF BOMB MYSTERIOUSLY SERIOUS STOP MANY VICTIMS APPARENTLY RECOVERING SUDDENLY SUFFER FATAL RELAPSE DUE TO DECOMPOSITION OF WHITE BLOODCELLS AND OTHER INTERNAL INJURIES NOW DYING IN GREAT NUMBERS STOP ESTIMATED STILL OVER ONEHUNDREDTHOUSAND WOUNDED IN EMERGENCY HOSPITALS LOCATED SURROUNDINGS SADLY LACKING BANDAGING MATERIALS MEDICINES STOP"

The following sentence is from the end of *The Hiroshima Disaster* written by Junod, who, following Bilfinger, saw the devastation of Hiroshima with his own eyes: "In conclusion, for someone who was a witness, albeit one month later, of the dramatic consequences of this new weapon, there is no doubt in his mind that the world today is faced with the choice of its continued existence or annihilation." Shortly after the world's first use of the atomic bomb, the ICRC expressed its clear stance against nuclear weapons and communicated to Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across the globe the view that nuclear weapons should be eliminated. This stance has never wavered and continues to the present day.

However, the debate over nuclear weapons has traditionally been dominated by security and geopolitical arguments, and nuclear weapons were seen as a useful tool to ensure national and regional security and to maintain geopolitical balance. Against this backdrop, on April 20, 2010, just prior to the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Jacob Kellenberger, then President of the ICRC, referring to the indescribable human suffering and threat to the very existence of humanity posed by the use of nuclear weapons, stated that the use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the principles and rules of international humanitarian law and called on nations to put an end to the era of nuclear weapons for the interests of humanity. Following this ICRC statement, the Red Cross Movement adopted a resolution reaffirming its long-standing and consistent position on nuclear weapons and calling on states to work toward their abolition, along with a 4-year action plan. Subsequently, the concept of a humanitarian approach to nuclear weapons gained momentum, which led to the adoption and entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which will lead humanity toward a world without nuclear weapons.

We are concerned that in response to the recent global situation, there are continued threats of the use of nuclear weapons and that there is an increasing focus on nuclear weapons once again. The bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 and killed about 140,000 people by the end of that year had a nuclear output of 15 kilotons, but today, it would be classified as a small nuclear weapon. No country or international organization is capable of meeting the enormous humanitarian needs, saving lives, that would result from the use of nuclear weapons. The only way to prevent what cannot be addressed or dealt with is to prevent it from happening, and the only way to prevent nuclear weapons from being used again is to abolish them. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will play an indispensable role in achieving this goal. The ICRC will continue to urge all States to sign and ratify this important treaty.

The ICRC Delegation in Japan is also focusing its efforts on initiatives to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons. One such initiative is the empowerment of young people. Keita Takagaki, a native of Hiroshima, is passionate about working for the abolition of nuclear weapons with the belief that this mission was entrusted to him by his two great-grandfathers who were involved in atomic bomb relief efforts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He has also participated in the past two meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as an ICRC Youth Representative and made significant contributions, such as reading the ICRC statement in front of government representatives and, of the youth participating at side events from around the world, he spoke out about the reality of the atomic bombings. Through Mr. Takagaki's activities, I met many people in Hiroshima, one of whom is Chieko Kiriake, an atomic bomb survivor. My first encounter with her was a visit to the former Hiroshima Army Clothing Depot, an atomic-bombed building, in September 2021. Ms. Kiriake, who lived with her family near the clothing depot, saw the night sky of Hiroshima after the atomic bomb was dropped, and it was divided into two parts: one

side was bright red with burning flames, and the other side had beautiful stars. There is one message that Ms. Kiriake always has: "I think peace is in jeopardy. If you let your guard down for a moment, it will escape from your grasp, just like a balloon. So, we all need to hold it tightly and protect it so it doesn't get away." Taking these important words from Ms. Kiriake, who experienced the A-bombing, to heart, the ICRC will continue to do it utmost to promote a humanitarian approach toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. (February 2024)

"The night sky of August 6, 1945"
Drawn by Chieko Kiriake

Profile

〔Shoko Hanzawa〕

Joined the ICRC in 2019; worked to promote humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law as Humanitarian Affairs Advisor to the Delegation in Japan. Assumed position of Head of Delegation in Japan from June 2023. Prior to the ICRC, worked in the field of humanitarian assistance for more than 10 years, including at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The reality of the experiences of the hibakusha should be at the core of the nuclear disarmament debate

Shoko Koyama

Journalist, NHK Nagasaki Broadcasting Station

Shoko Koyama has been based in Nagasaki since 2024. She previously worked in Tokyo and Paris covering social and political issues and Geneva-based institutions in Switzerland. She started her career as a journalist at NHK Hiroshima in 2011 and has been focusing on issues associated with nuclear weapons ever since. She is a co-translator of The Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons: How it was Achieved and Why it Matters (Alexander Kmentt, first published in 2021 by Routledge)

In February this year, I was on a Shinkansen bullet train heading from Tokyo towards Osaka. Through the window, I saw Mount Fuji, dusted with snow. This vision of the mountain, illuminated by the setting sun, was so beautiful that I couldn't help but talk to the foreign woman sitting next to me, "That's Mount Fuji." She was visiting Japan from India with her family. She told me they were going to stay overnight in Kyoto and then continue their journey to Hiroshima afterwards.

When I asked, "Why Hiroshima?" she replied that her purpose was to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. With some hesitation, I asked her, "What do you think about India possessing nuclear weapons?" Her answer was, "There is no problem with possessing nuclear weapons as such. Most countries have them, don't they? The issue is not to use them."

The minority's advocacy of 'nuclear deterrence'

In reality, the claim that "most countries possess nuclear weapons" is factually incorrect. Currently, nine countries possess nuclear weapons: the five nuclear-weapon states defined by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China—as well as non-NPT states Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea, which has unilaterally withdrawn from the treaty. In addition, there are 34 countries, including Japan, which rely on the security guarantees of nuclear-weapon states, often referred to as being under a 'nuclear umbrella'. Given that the world has around 200 countries, the total number of nuclear-armed and nuclear-reliant countries (43 in total) remains a minority globally although they include those with the most power and the majority of the world's population.

These countries adopt a strategy called 'nuclear deterrence', where the threat of nuclear weapon use is intended to deter an enemy's attack. However, the reality of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reveals the horrific consequences of nuclear weapon use: these weapons indiscriminately kill large numbers of people, and atomic bomb survivors – referred to in Japanese as '*Hibakusha*' – suffer from long-term health effects and discrimination. Even if nuclear-armed states do not intentionally use these weapons, accidental detonations could have impacts spreading across borders.

In other words, for the vast majority of countries that do not adopt a nuclear deterrence strategy, nuclear weapons are not a means of security but a threat to the lives of their own citizens.

The Humanitarian Initiative

Around 2010, a small group of leading disarmament diplomats, researchers, and NGO experts began to re-frame the discourse on nuclear weapons by focusing on the humanitarian consequences. This approach later became widely known as the 'Humanitarian Initiative'.

This approach challenged the existing order established by the nuclear-armed states and generated significant momentum. On this basis, seven years later, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by a United Nations conference (by a vote of 122 States in favor, with one vote against and one abstention, among those that attended the conference) on 7 July 2017 and came into force on 22 January 2021.

Preserving the memories of the *hibakusha's* experiences

As a journalist, I have followed this process and covered the commitment of *hibakusha* speaking out about their experiences at international conferences. One such *hibakusha* is 81-year-old Masako Wada, Assistant Secretary General of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo).

Wada was 1 year and 10 months old at the time of the bombing, and she shares her testimony based on stories she has heard from her mother. Their home was sheltered in the shadow of a mountain, so the family survived, but many people with burns all over their bodies sought refuge nearby. Furthermore, the vacant lot next to their home was used as a cremation site for bodies.

I interviewed Wada for the first time in 2016. Not being familiar with Nagasaki at that time, even when she told me that her home was 2.9 kilometres from the hypocentre, I struggled to imagine the reality of that location. When I was assigned to the NHK Nagasaki Broadcasting Station last September and met Wada again earlier this year, I asked her about her home's location. She told me, "It's Imahakata-machi in Nagasaki. You can see it from your apartment balcony."

The 'cremation ground' Wada described has now become a park where children play. How many people must have suffered and died there 80 years ago in this peaceful place? Without those who pass on these stories or preserve records, the humanitarian tragedy will soon be forgotten and, within just a few decades, effectively erased from memory. Even as someone who has been covering nuclear issues carefully, I was confronted with the reality that I still know very little.

As global citizens, let us work together

As of March 2025, there are 99,130 *hibakusha* from Hi-roshima and Nagasaki living in Japan (source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare), with an average age of 86.13 years. Some *hibakusha*, like Wada, who were very young at the time, have no memory of the events and others have diffi-culty communicating today. While the number of *hibakusha* is declining due to ageing, there are still as many as 99,130 alive today. It is our mission to record and pass on their testi-monies and thoughts until the very last *hibakusha* has gone. Since it was human beings who created nuclear weapons, it must also be human beings who can put an end to them. Humanity must have the wisdom to do so, and we need to continue to draw on that wisdom as long as we live. And at the heart of discussions on nuclear weapons should always be the reality of what the *hibakusha* endured.

Watching news of ongoing military clashes between nu-clear-armed India and Pakistan in May reminded me of the conversation I had with the Indian tourist on the Shinkansen. I wonder what she felt after visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Having encountered the reality of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, how will she now cope with the continued existence of nuclear weapons? As members of the global community, I can only hope that we can join forces to think about what kind of world we should try to create to-gether.

(July 2025)

(This article reflects the author's personal views and does not represent the organisation she belongs to.)

The experience of the Atomic Bombing in Hiroshima: Embodying the Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences

Shiro Tani
Vice Chairperson, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation

The humanitarian and humankind's approach in dealing with the use of nuclear weapons is gaining universal acceptance in the international community. It represents a paradigm shift in the way nuclear weapons are handled, from being discussed primarily from the perspective of national security to a wider perspective of protecting human survival – a shift that reflects the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. The motivation of this shift is to revive nuclear disarmament, which has not been making any progress, through a fundamental change of mindset both inside and outside of government.

I believe that all who seek to achieve world peace and security would benefit from communicating the tragic reality of the atomic bombings as the ultimate foundation for the humanitarian and humankind's approach to disarmament. In other words, this approach builds on the belief that the devastating heat rays, blasts, and radiation from the atomic bombings prove that such weapons threaten the survival of the human race, and must therefore be abolished on the basis of these facts. Together, they represent the harshest of realities.

The humanitarian and humankind's approach offers great potential to overcome conventional approaches to dealing with nuclear weapons issues, such as the illusion that such weapons serve a useful purpose of deterrence. The intent of this alternative approach is to address directly the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of even a single use of such weapons, let alone the unimaginable horrors of a nuclear war.

Below, three specific benefits of this approach are discussed.

First, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) are compatible and complementary as concrete paths toward nuclear weapons abolition. Both of these

treaties share the same basic recognition of the humanitarian and humankind's approach, with its mission to prevent the destruction of humanity by the use of nuclear weapons. For this reason, it is significant to emphasize the reality of the atomic bombings in conjunction with this approach in order to create a common ground for discussions between parties to these treaties.

Second, motivated young people sometimes ask what they should do for nuclear weapons abolition. If we take the humanitarian and humankind's approach, they will understand that communicating the reality of the atomic bombings will itself play a major role in shaping public opinion to support nuclear abolition. Foreign visitors and Japanese students on school excursions to Hiroshima will also be able to understand that the reality of the atomic bombing, as perceived through the exhibits at Peace Memorial Museum and testimonies of the *hibakusha* , represents the destruction of humanity through the use of nuclear weapons. They will be convinced that there is no other way for the survival of humanity but to abolish nuclear weapons.

Third, in response to the explanation of the reality of the atomic bombings, various opinions may be raised, such as "many deaths have also occurred in other air raids," or "nuclear deterrence is necessary from a geopolitical perspective." Yet despite these varying opinions, no one can deny the fundamental reality that atomic bombings inevitably lead to the destruction of human race, given the indiscriminate effects from the use of nuclear weapons. This further reinforces the need to work for the global abolition of all such weapons.

As described above, we believe that the role of Hiroshima will become even more important as it will be able to contribute to international discussions on a world free of nuclear weapons based on the humanitarian and humankind's approach. Having experienced firsthand the horrific effects of these weapons, our city is both willing and able to communicate the reality of the atomic bombings in a way that is linked to this approach. We must approach nuclear disarmament as a solemn and effective means to reaffirm our common humanity. (November 2023)

Atomic Bomb Dome

Children's Peace Monument