

**Acceptance Speech by the Mayor of Hiroshima at the Gautam Buddha
International Peace Award Ceremony**

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Hibakusha, Shinran and Mayors for Peace

May 17, 2011

Right Honourable President of Nepal, Dr.Ram Baran Yadav,
Right Honourable Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr.Jhala Nath Khanal,
Honourable Minister for Culture, His Excellency Mr.Kul Chandra Gautam, Chairman of
the Award Selection Committee,
His Excellency Dr.Ganesh Yonzan Tamang, Ambassador of Nepal to Japan,
His Excellency Mr.Tatsuo Mizuno, Ambassador of Japan to Nepal,
and His Excellency Mr.Tomihisa Taue, Mayor of Nagasaki
distinguished guests, friends,
ladies and gentlemen;

It is my honor, pleasure and privilege to stand here, as former mayor of Hiroshima, on behalf of the hibakusha, or A-bomb survivors, the citizens of Hiroshima as well as the nearly 5,000 cities and mayors that belong to Mayors for Peace. It has been a tremendous honor for me to be able to work with them and for them since my youth, but especially as mayor of Hiroshima for 12 years.

Thank you very much for recognizing their efforts toward creating a nuclear weapon free world, in the form of the Gautam Buddha International Peace Prize. Please allow me to outline the history of their efforts and indicate where we are headed.

In sum, I should mention that Mayor for Peace is the fastest growing NGO in the world and the next item on its agenda is to create a nuclear weapons convention. Clearly, the NWC will be a practical mid-point to the realization of a nuclear weapon free world by 2020. We firmly believe this scenario is possible because our goal is supported by the overwhelming majority of the world.

I would like to venture a little further and assert that the wish to rid the world of not only nuclear weapons but all war is based on human nature. If I may be allowed to

venture further, a more accurate description might be that the wish for peace is based on the Buddha nature in all of us.

We have all seen a glimpse of this among the people who are the victims of the catastrophic earthquakes and tsunamis that hit the Eastern part of Japan. The behavior of the people who were so tragically affected by the catastrophe is almost "saintly." Words of praise as well as condolence, sympathy, encouragement, prayer and others of goodwill have reached Japan.

I wish to join these people, together with all of you here, to offer our condolences to those who lost their lives so tragically, promising that we will do everything in our power to help ease the pains of those who are far from returning to their normal lives and offer our hands in the future efforts of restoring their cities, towns, and livelihoods.

Firefighters, medical doctors, water specialists, volunteers of every kind rushed to those areas from Hiroshima. Whenever a catastrophe of any kind befalls any population, this is a typical reaction that Hiroshima citizens take because it reminds them of what happened almost 66 years ago.

Those who came back after a period of rescue or volunteer work were moved by what they saw, heard and experienced. Especially moving to them was that the evacuees were so glad to know that Hiroshima cares and the very presence of Hiroshima amidst the confusion, uncertainty, fear and doubt meant a great deal to the victims.

Hiroshima does understand their sufferings and pains because the city went through a similar and perhaps worse experience. Hiroshima offers hope because Hiroshima citizens have been able to reconstruct their city and achieve prosperity. Many expect that Hiroshima could offer an effective cure for the damage caused by radiation.

Drawing parallels between Hiroshima and the Eastern Japan tragedy, including Fukushima, is important as well as understanding many differences so that together, we can create a better future for the victims and for all of us. The key word here is "the future." In an important sense, which I would like to elaborate, Hiroshima has been able to become what it is today by focusing on the future.

Let me start by summarizing what the hibakusha went through and have made of their

experiences by quoting from the Peace Declaration of 1999. In it, I described what I believe to be the three most important gifts the hibakusha have given us. Let me summarize that declaration.

The first is that they were able to transcend the infernal pain and despair that the bombings sowed and to opt for life. They hovered between life and death in a corpse-strewn sea of rubble and ruin—circumstances under which none would have blamed them had they chosen death. Yet they chose life.

Their second accomplishment is that they effectively prevented a third use of nuclear weapons. Their determination to tell their story to the world, to argue eloquently that to use nuclear weapons is to doom the human race, and to show the use of nuclear weapons to be the ultimate evil has brought about this result. We owe our future and our children's future to them.

Their third achievement lies in their representing the new worldview as engraved on the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims. They have rejected the path of revenge and animosity that leads to extinction for all humankind. [This ends the quote.]

This new way of thinking manifests most commonly among the hibakusha in the phrase, "No one else should ever suffer as we did." This phrase does not sound particularly revolutionary until you understand that the "no one" they were referring to included those whom one would normally label as enemies.

This phrase and their desire to prevent any repetition of the nuclear tragedy actually rule out the possibility of revenge. It is a hibakusha philosophy of nonviolence and humanity born from an experience immediately recognized as a threat to the entire human species. Thus, the hibakusha message is so revolutionary that it has yet to be fully understood and digested by most of the human family.

This is the spirit of Hiroshima, the conviction that the survival of the human race is more important than any personal suffering, injustice, hatred or desire for retaliation.

One question that I am asked often is, why did the hibakusha, who are not a group of Einstein's and Kant's, come up with such a monumental philosophy?

One answer I can offer is the nature of a city. Among many important characteristics of a city I would like to emphasize that it is not a small scale country in a nation-state framework. Although nations are the way we human beings now are taught to look at the world and history, especially war, cities are the way we understand suffering. I have visited Gernika, Spain, and Ypres, Belgium, among others. Both cities are as devoted as Hiroshima to remembering the tragedies they suffered in war and to preventing any repetition of such tragedies, not just in their own cities but anywhere on Earth. Their message is, like Hiroshima, "Never again."

People rarely suffer alone. The suffering of any individual is actually the suffering of at least a family, if not a neighborhood or a wider community, and a city is a vital, true and personally relevant level of collective identity. That is why we speak of Auschwitz, the My Lai massacre, the Dresden bombing, for example, when we refer to these sufferings. Suffering becomes an integral part of the collective memory, and peace is the natural answer to the question, how can we keep this from happening again?

Mayors generally arise from the collective consciousness of their city. We are close to our citizens. We suffer when they suffer. We are generally honest because we cannot deny facts. When garbage is left on a curbside or a pothole is left unfilled, we cannot pretend it is not there. We are relatively neutral in terms of ideology and other values because we must serve all citizens regardless of their political affiliations.

Given this close relationship of cities to "reality," it is obvious that the international system, which is so sorely and obviously lacking the basic skills of democracy and civilized behavior, requires far greater input from cities. We need to institutionalize a civil society-driven process, most notably exemplified by the one that led to the Anti-Personnel Land Mine Convention. We need a process that reflects city views and values when important decisions are made, and the survival of humanity certainly is important.

That is why, in 2003, we launched what we called an Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons which is also known as the 2020 Vision Campaign because we are promoting our vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world by 2020. In the 12 years since I took office, our membership has grown from 440 city members to more than 4,700, and we now include Moscow, London, Paris, Beijing, New Delhi, Rawalpindi, and Jerusalem from nuclear-armed states. I expect that more cities will join us soon,

bringing the total to 5,000.

In many ways, cities do stand independent from nation-states. Such strength of a typical city is derived not from military power but from diversity. A typical city consists of people who differ in job, ethnic background, religion, political opinion, economic circumstances, age, gender, and, more generally, in their value system. And yet, since they must live in harmony within a limited space and time, they try to find at least some common threads that sustain a community. Through this everyday effort is born a creative solution. In the case of the hibakusha in Hiroshima or Nagasaki the creative solution was the philosophy of reconciliation embodied in the expression, “No one else should ever suffer as we did.”

The second answer to the question of “why” is that their philosophy of reconciliation is the only one that does justice to their suffering.

The hibakusha tried to explain their plight in every possible way, but none of them worked satisfactorily until they found the depth of their expression, “No one else should ever suffer as we did.” As I mentioned earlier, this line of logic and sentiment that advocates “Never again” is universal among cities round the world.

“Universal” by definition, means that it is based on human nature. At the same time, for me personally at least, it seems just as convincing to see that it is the Buddha nature in all of us that compelled hibakusha and others to come to that conclusion. There is a religious history and environment in Hiroshima that offer hints of such thinking.

Hiroshima is known as an area where many followers of a particular sect of Buddhism, called the Jodo Shinshu, or literally translated, the true teachings of the Pure Land, happen to live. The sect was founded by Reverend Shinran in the 13th century.

The essential tenet of Jodo Shinshu is that all one needs to be guided to the Pure Land is to abandon oneself and chant the word “Namuamidabutsu”, which means that one accepts the guidance of the Buddha whose attributes are infinite life and hope.

To me a more significant part of the teaching is that one’s journey does not end there. Once one reaches the Pure Land, or the other world, one then returns to this secular

world to help others so that all humanity will be saved as well.

The hibakusha's efforts can be interpreted within this framework of returning to the secular world to save humanity. After having experienced a living hell, thus having had a glimpse of the other world, the hibakusha have returned to this secular world to save us from the evils of this world, especially from nuclear weapons. Their actions are thus guided by the Buddha nature itself and are consequently universal.

Whether you call it human nature or Buddha nature, it is true that cities that have suffered from the scourges war and violence come to the conclusion "Never again" and are joining Mayors for Peace to create a world free from nuclear weapons and war.

It is not only the cities round the world who share our vision of nuclear weapon free world. As you know very well, President Obama of the United States declared to the world that it is his and America's moral responsibility to create such a world.

Not only the United States but the United Nations is with us. On August 6th last year, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon became the first UN Secretary-General ever to attend the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima. His presence in Hiroshima on that day and everything he said and did while he was with us were clear evidence that he is true to his word; the abolition of nuclear weapons is the top priority for him personally and for the UN.

In his mind the timeline is also very clear. Secretary-General Ban endorsed the 2020 Vision Campaign of Mayors for Peace, without any reservation, by declaring it a "perfect vision."

And we are sure we can accomplish our goal by 2020. Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon also believes we can. Inviting all people around the world to Hiroshima in 2020, he said: "Let us pledge to join together on the 75th anniversary of the bombing – with the hibakusha – to celebrate the end of nuclear weapons."

I am confident that we will be able to actualize a massive array of celebrations all over the world because new, inspiring efforts are sprouting everywhere in the world.

Let me just mention a Japanese grass-roots group including hibakusha called the "Yes!

Campaign.” They toured most Japanese cities knocking at the doors of mayors they had never met. Luckily, many complied and this campaign collected support signatures for the 2020 Vision from more than two thirds of mayors in Japan. Such a bold approach would not even have been conceived ten years ago.

Secondly, younger mayors now are leading the movement. One example among many should convince you that this is phenomenal. Mayor Ebine of Fujisawa City in Kanagawa Prefecture near Tokyo, organized a peace symposium last November. One of the important events related to this symposium was the meeting of all mayors in Kanagawa Prefecture. At the conclusion of this meeting all the mayors passed a resolution that they will work together to create a nuclear weapon free world by 2020.

Again Japanese efforts for the abolition of nuclear weapons accomplished a great deal, this is the first time that ALL mayors belonging to a prefecture came to pass such a strong resolution with a definite timeframe.

Rock musicians, artists, sports stars, novelists, Nobel Laureates, farmers, students, and many more are joining mayors and we are now seriously considering replicating efforts which have proved themselves successful in their efforts to ban anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. For this purpose, our next step is to persuade enough national governments the world over to agree on a Nuclear Weapons Convention that clearly bans all nuclear weapons on earth.

The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mayors for Peace, and the people of Nepal all share a common vision. We see the possibility of a world where war, violence, starvation and widespread environmental destruction are, like institutional slavery, viewed with horror as artifacts of our barbaric past. Nuclear weapons have no place in such a world, and I believe history books will note that the creation of such a world actually began with the banning and total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Working together, we have the capacity to create such a world, and I believe we will. In 1972, we achieved the chemical weapons convention. In 1993, it was the biological weapons convention. In 1998, it was the anti-personnel landmine convention. In 2008, it was the cluster munitions convention. In 2015, with your help, it will be a nuclear weapons convention, leading to a nuclear-weapon-free world by 2020.

Thank you very much.