Report on the International Hibakusha Appeal Signature Campaign

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I am deeply grateful to be given this opportunity to report on the achievement of our International Hibakusha Appeal signature campaign to Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. Ms. Nakamitsu, thank you for joining us despite your busy schedule.

Since we barely survived the A-bomb atrocity, we have made various efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. Because we, the Hibakusha, have a strong desire that no one anywhere should suffer as we have, we have dedicated our lives to seeing nuclear weapons to be abolished in our lifetime.

The fact that there are still about 14,000 nuclear warheads on the globe is totally unacceptable. As the last-ditch effort for the aged Hibakusha to raise our voices together, in April 2016, we issued the “Appeal of the Hibakusha” to call on all State Governments to conclude a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons. With the support of civil society organizations and people of all ranks, we launched the “International Signature Campaign in support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha” for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

It is not easy to make the leaders of the pro-nuclear weapon countries renounce their nuclear arsenals. For this, creating a movement of an unprecedented scale is essential. So we decided to aim at collecting tens of millions of signatures in Japan and hundreds of millions more internationally.

The signature campaign made progress in the past 4 years: new coalitions and signature promotion committees were formed in almost all prefectures in Japan, involving a wide range of organizations working together, including citizens’ groups, trade unions and religious groups. Pope Francisco’s visit of Nagasaki and Hiroshima last year, his Mass in Tokyo and his meeting with the Hibakusha all greatly encouraged our movement.

As of the end of September last year, about 10.51 million signatures were collected and submitted to the 75th UN General Assembly First Committee. So far, we have presented the petition to every session of the First Committee and the NPT Preparatory Committee. We really appreciate High Representative Nakamitsu joining the signature submission ceremony every time, and we hope that our initiative has helped encourage the work of the UN.

Our campaign received a strong backing from the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July 2017. The role of this signature campaign has become more and more important now in developing the campaign to achieve the entry-into-force of the Treaty. So far 36 countries have ratified the Treaty, with 14 more countries initially needed. Although normal social life is suspended due to the pandemic, we are committed to achieving the treaty’s entry-into-force within this year.

We set the end for the signature campaign this coming fall at the UN General Assembly 2020, as this is the milestone year as the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing and the establishment of the United Nations. It also marks the 50th anniversary of the NPT’s entry-into-force, when the 2020 NPT Review Conference was to be convened.

Entering the final year of the signature campaign, we launched one last major effort, intensifying outreach to civil society, trade unions and young people especially in Europe, Central and Latin America and the USA through an online petition and SNS, etc. Despite the pandemic causing serious difficulty in our signature campaign, many young workers are joining to hold creative online activities, especially online testimonies of Hibakusha, which has gained the participation of many young people.

We urgently need to contain the pandemic and restore our political, economic and social lives. At the same time, achieving a world without nuclear weapons and blocking the destruction of environment by climate change are also urgent tasks needed to overcome the crises of humanity and to ensure human security. Pledging to do our utmost to promote the signature campaign and by doing so to contribute to the tasks bearing on the survival of humanity, I conclude my report. Thank you for your attention.