From Hiroshima to New York: Overcoming the Nuclear Powers

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Friends let me begin with appreciation for this past year’s collaborations. On the eve of the NPT PrepCom, Yayoi Tsuchida and Kido Sueichi joined speakers from Iran and Israel, and India, Russia, Korea, and the U.S., for our “Growing Nuclear Risks in a Changing World: New Thinking & Movement Building” conference.

It was also my privilege to join the Japan-Korea Peace Forum in Seoul, observing each country’s Hibakusha, and organizers and activists sharing perspectives and building bonds for common action. I was encouraged by their enthusiasm for next year’s World Conference in New York, about which I’ll say more later.

I don’t need to rehearse the horrors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-Bombings for you. Two cities indiscriminately destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of innocent victims. Two additional realities still haunt me. First, even in military terms, as U.S. military leaders, including Eisenhower, Leahy and LeMay stressed, the A-bombings were not necessary to end the war. Japan’s warfighting capability had been destroyed, and for months the Japanese government had been attempting to surrender on the terms that were accepted AFTER the A-bombings. Those were imperial A-bombs. They consensus among U.S. historians is that the determinative reason for the A-bombings was to bring the war to an immediate end to ensure that the U.S. would not have to share influence with the Soviet Union in northern China, Manchuria and Korea. So many innocent people sacrificed on the altar of empire.

The other horror that haunts me is the ABCC Commission here in Japan and Project 4.1 in the Marshall Islands. When I first came to Japan, it was difficult to believe Hibakusha when they said that they had been treated like guinea pigs, that U.S. doctors studied them but not provide care. Then, nineteen years ago, I arranged a meeting for Swada-sensi, Hashimoto-san and several others with the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of Energy who was responsible for all U.S. radiation studies. I explained the Hibakusha’s claim and asked if he could explain if and how they were wrong. His answer was staggering. “On no! We’ve used those studies for everything, including for the design of new nuclear weapons.” In this way, the U.S. was no better than Dr. Mengle in Nazi Germany.

Confronting these evils and the parallel histories of other nuclear powers is critical to building people’s power to transform the nuclear powers.

Friends, we live in the dangerous and uncertain interregnum following the end of the Post-Cold War world and the emergence of the new disorder. This era has disturbing parallels to the period leading to World War I: tensions between rising and declining powers, complex alliance structures, intense nationalism, territorial disputes, arms races with new technologies, economic integration and competition, and wild card actors. Trump’s trade wars, his abrogation and violations of international nuclear and climate treaties, his authoritarianism, humiliation of U.S. allies, his threat to obliterate Iran and continuing tensions with North Korea all reinforce this dynamic.

U.S. power has declined. China has risen. With its economic might, military buildup, South China Sea claims and Belt and Road initiative we are challenged by the classical Thucydides Trip between rising and declining powers.

Russia too is reasserting itself as a great, if economically weak, power. Responding to NATO’s reckless expansion to its borders and its own imperial traditions, Putin is fueling turmoil in Europe, checking the U.S. in Syria and Venezuela, and challenging the U.S. with asymmetric capabilities and increasing its reliance on its nuclear arsenal,

Elsewhere, the E.U. is in the early stages of developing its own nuclear-capable unified and independent great power military. India’s bombing in Balakot was the first time that one nuclear power directly attacked another, making the Indian-Pakistani nuclear arms race possibly the most immediate threat to human survival. North Korea is now a de facto nuclear weapons state, which fuels Japanese and South Korean right-wing nuclear ambitions. Right wingers in Australia dream of an Aussi nuclear bomb. And, with Trump’s help, Saudi Arabia is preparing to join Israel as the second Middle East nuclear power.

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has repeated its alarm that nuclear dangers and climate change have brought humanity two minutes to midnight. With its Nuclear Operations doctrine, the Pentagon has reiterated its first strike nuclear war fighting doctrine, stating that nuclear weapons “can radically alter or accelerate the course of a campaign…[They] could be brought into the campaign as a result of perceived failure in a conventional campaign, potential loss of control or regime, or to escalate the conflict to sue for peace on more-favorable terms.” To implement the doctrine, the U.S. is moving to deploy more usable low yield (Hiroshima size) nuclear weapons and has withdrawn from the INF Treaty.

Despite murmurings about possible low level negotiations between Washington and Moscow, with the earlier U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Trump’s violation of the nuclear deal with Iran, and Bolton saying that there’s no future for the New START Treat, Russia’s Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov was right when he said that: “A new era has begun… [with the U.S.] destroying the entire arms control system."

# Our responsibility, we know, is not only to understand the world, but to change it.

For a decade or more, with Gensuikyo, we have been discussing the possibility of holding a World Conference against A- & H- Bombs in the U.S. Of course, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the ideal sites for World Conferences, and next year, with the 75th anniversary, the commemorations, testimonies and movement building here in Japan will be of supreme importance.

But, with U.S. leaders refusing to face the criminal history of the A-bombings, allocating hundreds of billions of dollars in preparations for nuclear apocalypse, rejecting the Ban Treaty and refusing to fulfill its Article VI NPT obligations, a World Conference in New York will provide an great opportunity to call the world’s attention to the lessons and legacies of the first A-bombings and to marshal international people’s power for a nuclear weapons-free world.

The challenge will be to teach how destructive, unnecessary and totally unacceptable those indiscriminate nuclear atrocities were, that nuclear weapons and human beings cannot exist, and that continuing preparations for nuclear war cannot be tolerated. Next year will be one of our last opportunities to provide Hibakusha and their testimonies the forums and visibility they deserve. (Let’s all do what we can to ensure that Nihon Hidankyo receives the Nobel Peace Prize that it so richly deserves.) And, as the masters of war threaten human survival, with the Hibakusha signature campaign, the Ban Treaty, the Back from the Brink and common security initiatives, we must use the anniversaries to demonstrate that another, nuclear weapons-free world is possible.

Let me share two stories to underline the importance of our World Conference

This spring, I spoke with a staff member of the U.N. Office of Disarmament Affairs to prepare the way to invite U.N. Secretary General Guterres to speak at next April’s World Conference. I referred to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon’s remarkable speech at our conference on the eve of the 2010 Review Conference. He surprised me, saying that he’d been on the UNODA staff back then.

He went on to say that Secretary General Ban was energized by delivering his speech. More importantly, he was so deeply moved by the extended standing ovation he received from the 1,000 strong audience, that he made nuclear disarmament a higher personal priority for himself and gave U.N.’s Office of Disarmament Affairs greater priority and more resources

Five years later, on the eve of the 2015 Review Conference, we held an inspiring international disarmament and peace conference in New York, followed by a Times Square rally, a march to the U.N., a festival and the presentation of nearly seven million abolition petition signatures to Ambassador Feroukhi, the President of the Review Conference and the High Representative for Disarmament. What was remarkable was that when she opened the Review Conference, Ambassador Feroukhi lectured the assembled diplomats, instructing them that our conference, march and petition signatures represented the will and expectations of international civil society.

The actions and sacrifices of everyone involved in those events made our impact possible. Now, with the Doomsday Clock set at 2 minutes to midnight, next year’s New York World Conference provides us with a unique opportunity to pull humanity back from the brink of nuclear war and environmental disaster, to press for the fulfillment of the promises of the NPT and BAN Treaties, and to build our movements for the struggles ahead.

As we begin our organizing, we have brought together an impressive core of nuclear disarmament organizations to build our World Conference and mobilization: the American Friends Service Committee, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Campaign for Peace Disarmament and Common Security, Gensuikyo, Gensuikin, Hidankyo, International Peace Bureau , Peace Action, PSPD in Korea, as well as the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the International Confederation of Trade Unions and the UNI Global Union. Over the coming months we will be reaching out to environmental, justice, religious and other organizations.

To accommodate what we anticipate will be a very large Japanese delegation, the conference will be held in the prestigious Riverside Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his seminal “Beyond Vietnam” speech. And, just before leaving for Japan, I sent off our invitation to U.N. Secretary General Guterres.

In addition to our World Conference, our rally, march and presentation of the more than10 million Hibakusha petition signatures to the Review Conference will send powerful messages to the assembled diplomats and the world.

Friends, the hour is getting late. With the great powers on the verge of launching unrestrained nuclear arms races, with tinder boxes set across the planet from Taiwan and the South China, Iran and Korea, and from the Baltic to the Black Seas, the need for united and determined action has never been greater. Our people’s movements and the governments which brought us the Ban Treaty are our greatest sources of hope. Together we must prevail!