

80th Anniversary Special Program in Hiroshima: Inheriting Hibakusha's Experiences into the Future, August 4

Speech by TAKATO Seiji

Hibakusha

I was four years and six months old. On that morning, I was alone leafing through a picture book. Suddenly, an intense flash of light, so strong as I had never seen before, illuminated every corner of the room. With a drum-like detonation sound, the whole house began shaking violently and the paper sliding doors and partitions, with things on the shelves, fell down on the floor. Terrified, I ran out of the house, crying. I saw the sky over Hiroshima city change colors, from red to blue and then blue to yellow. Burned flakes of paper were flying down from the sky. It was getting dark around. After a while, the rain began to fall but I do not remember being soaked, probably because I was sheltered under the eaves as I watched what was going on.

When I was a first or second grader in elementary school, I got an abscess on my leg and it was very slow to heal. In the morning, when I washed my face, I would often get a nosebleed. I sometimes fainted when I was standing on the school ground in a morning assembly. In my third year in elementary, I had swollen lymph nodes in the groin and had the tumor removed three times at the hospital. But with time, my health condition improved as I grew up. I spent my school years like any ordinary boy, going to junior high, high and college from my parents' house. At any moment, I thought I might be affected by the "black rain" that showered on that day after the bombing, I became a biology teacher in high school..

Six years ago, my hands grew numb and I felt dizzy. After an MRI examination, the doctor told me that I had a cerebral infarction. As I went to the hospital at an early stage, I got better after a week of hospitalization. But five months later, the doctor found me with an arrhythmia, with upper chambers of my heart vibrating and not functioning normally. I was again hospitalized. I had been in good health and had not

thought I was exposed to atomic bomb radiation. But I was in fact in an area where the black rain fell 80 years ago. I may have taken in radioactive particles that were floating in the area. I felt so horrified.

I began campaigning for “Black Rain” sufferers in September 2002. A survey conducted soon after the WWII, excluded the Saeki area from the black rain area. I was living there. I and other neighbors decided to work for the government recognition of black rain sufferers as the A-bomb victims by establishing the “Saeki district Black Rain Association”. The “black rain” story had long been a taboo because, as the radiation effects were believed to be transmitted from generation to generation, our children and grandchildren might suffer discrimination. However, at the founding general assembly of the Association, as many as 40 people turned out and shared their personal stories including their difficulties and sufferings they endured. We thought we could not leave the issue any longer but we should stand up and act. With that resolve, I decided to take the lead in the campaign to expand the officially admitted black rainfall areas.

I must admit that it was a hefty job to make publicly known the damage of internal radiation exposure because such damage had been disregarded for a long time. We collected signatures and compiled testimonies of hibakusha, to support our arguments and had negotiations with the administrative authorities. But our call was not heard. In the last resort we took the case to court, demanding that the government issue hibakusha health handbook (certificate) to us. We emphasized that those people who were showered with the black rain outside the recognized zones might be eligible for government assistance because they might also have suffered internal radiation exposure. In fact, all the plaintiffs were suffering from serious diseases. All the 84 plaintiffs’ were diagnosed with various health problems all of which could be attributed to the effect of radiation.

In July 2020, the Hiroshima District Court supported the plaintiffs’ demand. In July 2021, the Hiroshima High Court upheld the district court ruling, bringing a total victory to the plaintiffs, who received the A-Bomb Victims’ Health Handbook. They are saying with joy that they now can go to the hospital whenever needed. As the new

certification criteria took effect, we began to help those hibakusha who did not join the black rain lawsuit so that they can obtain the hibakusha health handbook. We feel relieved to see nearly 100 hibakusha receive the health handbook.

Nevertheless, still many people who apply for the health handbook are denied recognition. In Hiroshima Prefecture, as of the end of April this year, more than 7,000 people were recognized as hibakusha but more than 400 people were denied recognition. A group of people mainly made up of those showered with radioactive rain outside the three black rain areas designated by the government, have filed a second lawsuit. The discussion over how far the radioactive particles flew has not been settled yet.

There is no safety threshold for internal radiation exposure. If even one radioactive particle enters human body and stays there, it will emit radiation regularly and destroy DNA, ultimately causing cancer. The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant produced and diffused radioactive particles extensively. It should have caused damage just as the black rain did.

In spring this year, I took a trip to Fukushima Prefecture. I stopped over in Tokyo to meet two women in their twenties, who developed thyroid cancer after the nuclear power plant accident. They are plaintiffs of the “311 Children’s Thyroid Cancer Trial.” They told me that they plucked up their courage to take legal action but were told by some people not to put the brakes on Fukushima’s efforts to rebuild itself. They talked about how difficult and sad it is for our voices not to be heard in spite of carrying on a legal battle. They cannot share the problems concerning their trial even with their close friends. The six plaintiffs are withholding their names and faces. They are forced to fight by themselves alone.

The common point between damage of black rain and Fukushima nuclear plant accident is the damage from radiation exposure and the cover-up of their damage. It is my earnest wish to help radiation victims of Fukushima based on the experience of

the hibakusha's struggle for black rain victims. We will work together to create a world without nuclear weapons, overcoming the silence and breaking the cover-up. This is all that black rain hibakusha wish for this 80th anniversary of the atomic bombing.

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