

World Conference against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs- HIROSHIMA –
05/08/2025

Thank you so much to the Organizing Committee of the World Conference against A and H Bombs for inviting me to Japan to take part in this historic event.

As somebody who has spent my life opposing nuclear weapons, I feel honoured to be here, and I want to emphasise my immense respect to all who organised this poignant, global commemoration.

THE HIBAKUSHA

I want to begin with the story of Fujio Torikoshi. Fujio was 14 years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, 80 years ago.

He was eating breakfast with his mother when he heard a rumbling and stepped outside into the front garden. All he could see was a black dot in the sky, when it suddenly burst outwards to fill the sky with a blinding white light.

He recalls his last memory: being lifted off the ground by a hot gust of wind. He was more than 2 kilometres away from the blast, but he could still feel a burning sensation all over his body. That's when he passed out on his front porch.

Eventually, he woke up in hospital. He was told by the doctors he wouldn't live past 20. He lived to be 86 years old and died in 2018. In one of his last interviews, he said this: "All I can do is pray – earnestly, relentlessly – for world peace."

This week, we remember every single person who was killed by an indefensible act of inhumanity – both on Hiroshima and on Nagasaki.

We also remember the hundreds of thousands of survivors like Fujio – known as the *hibakusha*. They are the ones who endured the horror of what was left behind. They are the ones who have been campaigning to ensure the horrors of Hiroshima never happen again.

ME AND CND

When I was at school, we had a book club where we could choose a book for class. We chose ‘Brighter Than A Thousand Suns’, which told the story of Hiroshima. That book had a huge impact on me. Before that book, I didn’t know what a nuclear explosion was. I didn’t know the destruction it could cause. It was that book that taught me that nuclear weapons have one purpose, and one purpose only: to cause death and destruction on a colossal scale.

When I was 14, in the 1960s, I joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, after following and being frightened by the Cuban Missile Crisis. My first ever demonstration of any sort was with CND – and I have been a campaigner against nuclear weapons ever since. It was at CND where I met Bruce Kent, a leading figure in CND in the 1980s. It was Bruce who said, “I want to be optimistic because I don’t think man is intrinsically violent.” He inspired in us a belief that peace was not just preferable, but possible.

Over the years I’ve got a lot of flak over the years for daring to say that I would not wish to use a nuclear bomb on human beings. For having the audacity to say that killing millions of people would not make the world a safer place.

For those who are in any doubt over my position: I’m not interested in bombs. I’m interested in peace.

We shouldn’t forget the impacts not just of nuclear war, but the programme of nuclear testing which began at the end of the Second World War. These programs caused widespread radioactive contamination and generational harm to the people of the Pacific region. It is estimated that more than 2 million people have died from cancer as a result of these nuclear test explosions.

Joseph Rotblat was a Polish physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project, before becoming a fierce critic of nuclear weaponry. I want to share two things he said. One, “There is no direct evidence that nuclear weapons prevented a world war.” Two, “Above all remember your humanity.”

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

I grew up in a period where people were fearful of the possibility of global nuclear war. There was a realisation of just how dangerous nuclear weapons are.

A great achievement was the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, signed in 1970.

The 5 declared nuclear weapons states—Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the USA and China—agreed to ensure that there was no proliferation of their weaponry, and to take steps towards their own eventual nuclear disarmament.

Since then, several countries have taken steps that have lessened nuclear tensions in certain places. The most dramatic example was when post-apartheid South Africa, led by President Mandela, announced that it would no longer develop any nuclear weapons, and would completely disarm.

That in turn brought about a nuclear weapons-free continent of Africa, also known as the “Pelindaba Treaty”, which came into force on 15 July 2009. Those events were followed by nuclear weapons-free zones for the whole of Latin America and for central Asia.

These treaties showed that it *is* possible to get countries to agree in mutual co-operation, mutual disarmament and mutual peace.

And that’s why we must continue to push for a renewed adherence to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which bans the development, production, possession, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY UK

I was the Leader of the Labour Party in 2015-2020 and wanted to change the narrative about nuclear weapons.

The mainstream media were emphasising the idea that nuclear weapons were a form of defence.

A journalist asked me if I became Prime Minister if I would press the button. I said no, as I was that I was more interested in protecting not killing people.

I wanted to develop the Green Industrial revolution and deal with issues of global inequality and social justice as my priority.

RUSSIA / UKRAINE

Recently, UN Secretary-General António Guterres addressed the General Assembly last year and announced that the symbolic Doomsday Clock – which measures humanity's proximity to self-destruction - had moved to 90 seconds to midnight. Declaring that humanity was perilously close to catastrophe, Guterres named three perilous challenges. One, extreme poverty. Two, an accelerating climate crisis. And three, nuclear war.

Today, the global stockpile of nuclear weapons is accelerating as international relations are deteriorating. After a period of gradual decline that followed the end of the cold war, the number of operational nuclear weapons has risen again; there are now said to be more than 12,000 warheads around the world. 90% of these weapons are owned by Russia and the United States alone.

It's been more than three years since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. I want to take a moment to reflect on the hundreds of thousands of lives that have been lost in this ghastly war.

I also want to pay tribute to the thousands of peace campaigners in Russia who opposed this invasion and have continued to call for a ceasefire. I also want to thank those global figures who have called for de-escalation and diplomacy. That includes the UN Secretary-General, global leaders such as President Lula and Ramaphosa, and of course the late Pope Francis.

Three years on, and hundreds of thousands of deaths later, I renew these calls for peace.

The longer the fighting goes on, the more lives will be lost, and the greater risk of nuclear escalation. Those who fuel escalation must know that, in the event of a nuclear war, nobody wins.

GAZA

Meanwhile, we have all watched with absolute horror at what is happening in Gaza.

Over the past 18 months, human beings have endured a level of horror and inhumanity that should haunt us forever. Entire families wiped out. Limbs strewn across the street. Mothers screaming for their children torn to pieces. Doctors performing amputations without anaesthesia. Home by home, hospital by hospital, generation by generation.

We have not been witnessing a war. We have been witnessing a genocide, livestreamed before the entire world.

We must remember that our governments could have stopped this genocide. Instead, they allowed Israel to act with impunity, igniting a much wider war between Israel, the United States and Iran – and putting the world on the brink of a nuclear conflict.

I echo the call made by the UN Secretary-General: “There is no military solution. The only path forward is diplomacy. The only hope is peace.”

ARMS RACE VS A BETTER WORLD

The world spends 100 million dollars every year on nuclear weapons – imagine if we spent that money on renewable energy, social housing, public healthcare, schools and lifting children out of poverty instead?

Think of what we could achieve if the money that was spent on items that can only destroy the planet, was instead directed to resources that protected it – and all life on earth.

Security is not the ability to threaten and destroy your neighbour. Real Security is getting on with your neighbour. It’s when our children can be confident of a habitable future. It’s when human beings are not displaced by poverty, destitution and war. And it’s when everybody has enough resources to live a happy and healthy life.

As Albert Einstein said, “In the shadow of the atomic bomb it has become even more apparent that all men are, indeed, brothers.”

So today, we must remember those who were killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We mourn the lives that were so needlessly lost. And we must listen to the *hibakusha* when they say: “humans must survive - in peace and prosperity.” We will only honour their words – as well as the memory of those who perished on August 6th, 1945 – when we rid this planet of nuclear weapons once and for all.

We are all human beings on one planet. Surely that is enough to try and bring about a world of peace.