

2023 World Conference against A and H Bombs
International Meeting – Session 1

Shim Jin-tae
Chairperson of the Hapcheon Chapter
Korean Atomic Bomb Casualty Association
Republic of Korea

78 Years after A-bombing, Victims are present but perpetrators are not

Hello, friends

I am Shim Jin-tae, chairperson of the Hapcheon chapter of the Korean Atomic Bomb Casualty Association.

My parents were taken to Hiroshima from the Korean Peninsula for forced labor under Japanese policy of plundering Koreans during imperial Japan's occupation. My mother was mobilized to forced labor at a munitions factory. I was born on January 9, 1943 at 251 Eba Town, Hiroshima. My parents and I were exposed to the radiation from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945. I narrowly escaped death and returned to Korea to live with my grandfather. In my childhood I survived on miserable meals.

Since 2001, as the chairperson of the Hapcheon Chapter of the Korean Atomic Bomb Casualty Association, I have for more than 20 years witnessed the hardships the Korean Hibakusha have been experiencing. I have repeatedly questioned to myself why the Korean civilians, who had been taken to Japan, a country that committed war crimes, for forced labor, had to be killed by the bomb. Why they had to suffer from unknown diseases and die? I would demand an answer from the US government that dropped the bomb.

The ROK government should provide relief for, and support the Korean Hibakusha. But the successive Korean governments have been so cold that we doubt that we have our State.

No innocent civilians must be injured or killed by war for whatever reasons. I and all other Korean atomic bomb survivors have lived through enduring the cruel consequences of war. The resentment harbored by the Korean A-bomb victims and their descendants is as high as a mountain and as deep as sea.

Over the past 78 years since the atomic bombing, I have hardly been able to understand the reality that there are victims but not perpetrators to take responsibility. I firmly believe that this is an intolerable reality. This is why I came to believe that the Japanese government must be held responsible for causing war and that the US government must be held accountable for the atomic bombing.

In order to end the suffering caused by the atomic bombing, in order to prevent nuclear weapons from being used again, and in order to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, I firmly believe that we should make the United States accept responsibility for dropping the bomb and apologize for the crime.

In 2015, I took part in the NPT Review Conference. I was the first Korean A-bomb survivor to argue that Japan should apologize for taking Koreans to Japan for forced labor and that the United States should accept responsibility for forcing us, innocent people, to endure hardships caused by the atomic bombing. All A-bomb victims around the world should come forward to hold the United States responsible for the atomic bombing. I said this is necessary for realizing a world without nuclear weapons.

I'm aware how difficult it is to sue the United States. We also know that it may take decades to go through with such a lawsuit. So I call for an international people's tribunal as a first step to hold the United States accountable. If this way can be the foundation for bringing the case to court, we want to do so. This is the motivation for me to join this project as one of the would-be plaintiffs of the tribunal.

Thanks to the support and cooperation provided by the Solidarity for Peace and Reunification of Korea (SPARK), which recognized and accepted our wish, we successfully held the first international meeting in Hapcheon, South Gyeongsang Province, to prepare an international people's tribunal on the US atomic bombings. The city is often referred to as Hiroshima of South Korea. More than 30 people took part in the meeting from Gensuikyo. I want to express my gratitude for their contribution.

We hope to hold the second international meeting in 2024 in Hiroshima, the city where the Korean Hibakusha's pains started. We plan to hold the International People's Tribunal on Atomic Bombings in 2026 in New York, timed to coincide with the NPT Review Conference.

Time is running out. The first-generation Korean A-bomb survivors are all aging. The rest of their life is limited. I will soon turn 90. I will continue to contribute to creating a peaceful world without nuclear weapons until the end of my life by having the United States accept responsibility and offer an apology for dropping the atomic bomb.

It's correct to say that Korean and Japanese people are the biggest victim of the US atomic bombings. I take this opportunity to ask for your cooperation so that Korean and Japanese Hibakusha can join their forces to the 1945 US atomic bombing at the international people's tribunal.

Thank you for your attention.