

Nagasaki Day Rally, August 9, 2021

Ralph Hutchison
Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, USA

In the days, weeks, and months after August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States government imposed a complete blackout on news from the bombed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When John Hersey finally told the people of the United States about the effects of the bomb, the government moved quickly to create a different story, a myth—that the bomb was necessary to end the war, that it saved a million lives. This story was not only to ease the moral discomfort that people might have felt about the devastation of the bomb. It also insisted that the bomb be seen as a military weapon.

For more than seventy-five years, that effort has been mostly successful. The clear and courageous voices of *hibakusha* have not been listened to by the leaders of nuclear nations. Millions of people marched in the streets for nuclear disarmament; their governments ignored them. Even the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was only moderately successful—four more nations joined the nuclear powers, and the promise to pursue disarmament was eventually exposed to be a hollow promise.

But this past year, all of this changed. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22 of this year. One hundred twenty-two nations voted to approve the Treaty at the United Nations; eighty-four have signed it, and fifty-five have ratified it.

This Treaty changes everything. Although it does not have legal force in the states that have failed to join it, it does have moral force in every part of the world.

The fundamental change is this: the Treaty does not look at nuclear weapons from a military standpoint; it does not talk about nuclear policy or national security. The Treaty looks at nuclear weapons through the most important lens of all—the impact of these weapons on human beings and the environment.

The TPNW knows that nuclear weapons are an existential threat—if nuclear weapons are used, even in a modest exchange, millions will die instantly, the global fallout will kill tens of millions more, and the planet's water will be poisoned. But the deadliest effect of all will be nuclear winter—the cloud of debris launched into the atmosphere that will encircle the globe, block the sun, lower the planet's temperature, and trigger a relentless global famine. Those who survive the bomb will die of cancer or will starve. There will be no vaccine.

It is this truth—one that *hibakusha* and downwinders have been telling us for decades, that provides the power of the Treaty. And it is that power that we must be using to compel our governments to sign the Treaty and then to fully implement it—to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

When Setsuko Thurlow accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018, she called into the great hall in Oslo “the presence of all who perished.” Those spirits—parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, children, uncles, aunts, teachers, students, shopkeepers—everyone had

a name. Everyone was loved. And everyone holds our promise, that we will work to rid the world of nuclear weapons, that we will not stop until we have achieved a world free of nuclear weapons.

In the United States, more than 100 demonstrations took place on January 22 when the Treaty entered into force. In dozens of communities, at weapons sites, military bases, colleges, town halls, Congressional offices, and corporate headquarters, large yellow banners declaring Nuclear Weapons Are Illegal were unfurled. The media took little note. But the peace movement felt the spark.

That historic moment is now a movement, and it is growing in strength. It is a global movement—people all around the world are working for nuclear disarmament. But it is in our countries—the countries that have nuclear weapons and the countries that have security agreements—that the work is most important. And perhaps hardest, too. But we must not step back because it is hard.

In Japan, the power of the voices of *hibakusha* must be heard by the government. In the United States, too, we must hear those who understand as no one else the devastating inhumanity of nuclear weapons. Together, we must persevere.

In January, Setsuko Thurlow spoke again of those who have gone, and she told them we have accomplished something amazing, something she never thought she would see—a Treaty declaring nuclear weapons to be illegal. But she also told them that we are not finished—we have not yet reached the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. And then she said, “But we will do it. I promise you, we will do it.”

I believe that each one of us must make that promise our own. Those of us working for nuclear abolition in the United States know we have much hard work ahead of us. But I promise you, we will do it. We will use the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; we will tell the truth about the humanitarian and ecological impact of nuclear weapons; we will build alliances; we will amplify the voices of *hibakusha*, Pacific Islanders, and downwinders.

It is an honor to be with you during this conference. I am reminded of my journey to Hiroshima and Nagasaki more than a decade ago; I am encouraged by the great spirit of the Japanese people and the amazing bravery of those *hibakusha* who have been able to tell their story. We join with you in the simple demand: Never Again! In the presence of all those who perished, we pledge: Never Again! To our governments and in our organizing efforts we say: Never Again! Working together, hand in hand, in different languages but with one voice, we say: Never Again!

Ralph Hutchison, coordinator
Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance

time: 7.47