

2023 World Conference against A and H Bombs
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am moved to be here in Hiroshima today, and even more so to be able to address you. I must thank the Organising Committee for giving me this opportunity, and above all for making this conference possible, which is essential to remember the past and look to the future.

I would also like to thank the Mayor and City Council of Hiroshima, without whom, none of this would have been possible. Nor can I forget the Japanese Communist Party, in particular Vice-President Ogata, Director General Tagawa and Mr Yonezawa of the International Affairs Bureau, for their valued assistance to me.

I have a very special thought for my Japanese teacher. Kyôko-sensei was born in Hiroshima. Her parents were victims of the atomic bomb. Her mother was five years old and her father eleven. He was orphaned that day, along with his younger sisters and brother, because their home was only 900 metres from the impact. Although 95% of people died at that distance, he was able to live a long life until he was 82. What a miracle ! And now, his daughter has been living in France for 27 years, she has two beautiful children and she's my Japanese teacher. Life goes on, but the past MUST NOT be forgotten.

I remember how shocked I was as a child, when I learned about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As the teacher told us about this double tragedy, I was horrified by the frightening image of people literally reduced to dust by the combined effect of the shock wave, the firestorm and the gamma rays.

And yet, at the time, Western public opinion did not take the measure of the situation. On August, 8th 1945, « Le Monde » even ran the headline : "A scientific revolution. The Americans drop the first atomic bomb on Japan". Only few people were lucid about that. Among the few people who were aware of the situation, was Albert Camus, the novelist and philosopher dear to my heart, who wrote in the newspaper « Combat » on the same day : "Amidst a host of enthusiastic comments, we are told that any medium-sized city can be completely wiped out by a bomb the size of a soccer ball. [...] One might think that there is some indecency in celebrating a discovery that is first and foremost at the service of the most formidable rage for destruction that man has shown in centuries".

Albert Camus was absolutely right that, in addition to the appalling number of people who died immediately from the two atomic bombs, there were also the victims who died, years later, as a result of their burns or irradiation. Generally speaking, for the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, their ordeal had only just begun, with their suffering ostracised and denied.

Ever since the Hiroshima and Nagasaki disasters, the world has been gripped by a terrible fear that nuclear conflict could degenerate into the total destruction of humanity, and as international tensions mount on all sides, this fear is being reinforced. Not that we should simply blame Russia, North Korea, China and Iran. To set a path towards a "world without nuclear weapons", a wish expressed here by the G7, the West too must questioning itself. In this respect, I regret that to date the United States has still not apologised. A great country celebrates its victories, but it also has a duty not to turn its back on the darker dimensions of its history, and to face up to the consequences. No power can escape this when it comes to the butchery that was the Second World War.

Kenzaburô Ôe said that Hiroshima is a 'file' with which to sharpen our thinking and reflect on the present times. I don't think we have yet understood Hiroshima and Nagasaki.