

## **The 25th United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues Hiroshima, Japan**

### **Session 4: Collaboration with Civil Society: The Role of Civil Society in Creating a World Free of Nuclear Weapons; Education on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation**

#### **Promote disarmament education globally, prepare next steps to ban nuclear weapons Akira Kawasaki, Peace Boat**

The 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings is a highly symbolic one. Seventy years is roughly an average human lifespan. So time is running out for the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, known in Japanese as *Hibakusha*, whose average age is now over 80. The question now is what their legacy will be, and how the world will absorb the lessons that the Hibakusha have sought to teach us.

Despite global support for the 2020 Vision Campaign that Mayors for Peace has vigorously promoted, the prospect of a world with zero nuclear weapons in 2020 is becoming increasingly difficult. The failure of this year's NPT Review Conference to adopt a final document compounded this difficulty.

Nonetheless, as shown in the enormous amount of international media reports around the anniversaries of August 6 and 9 this year, Hibakusha are becoming even more active in calling for immediate actions to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons, to ensure that no one else in the world will never suffer from what they have suffered.

Peace Boat's Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World is an example of a civil society project for this purpose. Launched in 2008 and having taken place eight times since, this project brings survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki onboard Peace Boat to journey around the globe, sharing their experiences and appealing for a nuclear free world. From April to July of this year, eight Hibakusha from Hiroshima and Nagasaki traveled around the world on Peace Boat. They visited 25 cities in 19 countries, where they shared their testimony of their experiences during and since August 1945 with more than 2,000 people around the world. The project was carried out in partnership with Mayors for Peace, supported by the Cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The delegation of Hibakusha were kindly welcomed by member cities of Mayors for Peace in many countries. The project thus globally raised citizens' awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, and helped them to think of the danger posed by these weapons today.

The delegation of Hibakusha were also joined by three youth activists from Japan – a student, an actor and an artist, all in their 20s – who were officially designated by the Japanese Government as Youth Communicators for a World without Nuclear Weapons. The youth worked with the Hibakusha throughout the 105 days' global journey, together finding creative ways to communicate the horror of nuclear weapons which was experienced 70 years ago by those who are now old as their grandparents, to a much younger generation which is not educated at school about what happened under the mushroom cloud. A young British filmmaker also joined the voyage and created a documentary film, titled "I was her age," after the name of the project. This film is now available online for anyone to watch and share.

The "Special Communicator for a World without Nuclear Weapons" system was established by the Japanese government in 2010 as part of its disarmament education efforts. Initially Hibakusha themselves were appointed as such communicators, and since 2013, the government is also encouraging young people to become active as Youth Communicators. I appreciate those initiatives. However, there are two major challenges that should be tackled in order to further build upon past achievements in this area.

First, it is now time to broaden the scope of this educational initiative beyond national boundaries. Story telling of suffering as a result of nuclear weapons should not be limited to only a Japanese narrative. There are Hibakusha from Korea, and many other places around the world. Furthermore, many people have been affected by nuclear testing and other stages of the cycle of production of nuclear weapons in different parts of the globe. In regards to this issue, Peace Boat actively works with people from communities affected by nuclear weapons around the world, particularly with the people of Tahiti, in their process of rehabilitation, securing human rights, and passing on the memories to the next generation. Our ship will also visit the Marshall Islands next year, in support for the people affected by nuclear testing as well as of the government's courageous initiative at the International Court of Justice. I encourage governments to consider launching global nuclear disarmament education projects in collaboration with such Global Hibakusha.

Also, I encourage Japanese and other interested governments to have students and youth from many countries other than Japan to become Youth Communicators for a World Nuclear Weapons. The training of many young students, teachers or diplomats from around the world as communicators of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons would surely have a wide-scale, lasting impact. Peace Boat would be more than happy to offer our ship as venue for such training and education initiatives.

Second, education on the impact of nuclear weapons should now be developed into public debates on ways to free the world from such weapons. In this context I recall the very active government-NGO collaborations at the past three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, in disclosing and communicating the on the ground reality of the use of nuclear weapons. Now the discussion should proceed to the next stage – namely, how to prevent such a catastrophe from happening, by filling the legal gap of the currently eroding NPT regime. Any conferences or forums on the humanitarian aspect of nuclear weapons from now on should address the question of banning and prohibiting nuclear weapons under an international legal framework. Civil society groups, including the more than 400 partner organizations from 95 countries of ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, are willing and ready to help governments in finding such ways ahead, just as they have thus far helped in studying the impact of nuclear weapons.

The humanitarian initiative should not be limited to an acknowledgment of the humanitarian impact, but should now progress to clearing the pathway to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe. In the same way, nuclear disarmament education should also not just be education to teach the horrors of nuclear weapons. It should also encourage the consideration of international frameworks, including legal, to guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used, and to promote public debate towards that. Governments must not use the fact that they are conducting disarmament education as an excuse for not making real progress in disarmament itself.

Now is the time to encourage and mobilize legal and political experts in finding clear legal pathways. This indeed is exactly what the Hibakusha are demanding – the establishment of a clear pathway to eliminate nuclear weapons within their lifetimes.