



Interview:

Sowing the Seeds for Making the World Nuclear-Free

For Passing on and Sharing the Memories of the Atomic Bombing Seventy Years Ago

Interview with the Nagasaki Mayor TAUE Tomihisa by KUMAGAI Shinichiro,
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The NPT Conference and Visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Kumagai Shinichiro: The coming summer will be the seventieth since the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) held the latest Review Conference from April to May this year according to its interval of five years, but it produced no agreement on the final document. First of all, please tell us about your impression of the Review Conference.

TAUE Tomihisa: The fact that the Review Conference produced no agreement on the final document disappointed me deeply. About 100 citizens from Nagasaki took part in the conference in New York. They included many aging *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors) who participated in the gathering, thinking that this could be their last chance to find a concrete strategy for the abolition of nuclear weapons. I expected the Conference to somehow achieve progress for that reason. The conference disappointed me deeply in that sense.

But there were also new developments in the process stage. The establishment of a working group that confirms the fulfillment of Article 6 of the NPT, which prescribes “negotiations in good faith” toward nuclear disarmament and the like, was proposed at this stage. The draft final document also stated that the parties to the NPT “confirm that the impact of nuclear weapons use causes momentary or long-term consequences, and



Peace Statue at Nagasaki Peace Park



that such consequences are far more serious than was previously understood,” reflecting international discussions over the inhumanity of nuclear weapons. The draft final document also mentioned the need to strengthen education for disarmament, among other points.

Regarding visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the draft final document did not mention the two atomic-bombed cities by name, as reported variously, but it stated, “the conference recommends that all nations have exchanges with A-bomb survivors and areas where an atomic bomb was dropped, and directly share their experience to understand the inhuman impact of nuclear weapons, taking into consideration that this is the seventieth year since the conclusion of the deplorable devastation caused by World War II.” I think it was extremely meaningful for the draft final document to state that nations should share the experiences of not only Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also other locations, such as nuclear test grounds. We would like to turn the words of the draft final document into a foothold for our future activities.

Speaking of visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I would like to approach the leaders of various countries and realize their visits next year when the Summit Conference of Leading Industrialized Nations comes to Japan. In particular, I am hoping that U.S. President Barack Obama will visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, because he has referred to the possibility of visiting these cities during his term of office. I believe that visits by the president of the United States, the country that dropped the atomic bombs, will be a symbolic act as the global community advances initiatives for sharing the reality of atomic bombing.

President Obama made a deep impression on people around the world with a speech he delivered in Prague shortly after his inauguration as U.S. president. In this speech, Obama talked about the U.S. responsibility for abolishing nuclear weapons. He received the Nobel Prize for Peace for that reason. It might take a long time before another individual who is as informed and serious as Obama about the abolition of nuclear weapons becomes the president of the United States. I have made requests to senior U.S. government officials in Washington D.C. to realize Obama’s visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in person. Their responses were not negative at all. I have the feeling that Obama may give serious consideration to my request.

I think it is also essential for people on the Japanese side to discuss the historic significance of the U.S. president’s visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki at a deeper level.

Libran Cabactulan, who acted as the chairman of the previous NPT Review Conference five years ago, told me the following when I showed him a collection of photographs of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. “Some people ask me whether there are people exposed to radiation from an A-bomb who are still alive today. A lot remains unknown when it comes to nuclear weapons and the suffering they caused.” I feel the same way. That is the reality that we now face. We are calling on the leaders of various nations to visit our A-bombed city not because we simply want them to come, but because we want them to convey “knowing the reality” before everything else as their message by paying Nagasaki a visit.



The message that “we must make this the last A-bombed city” will have a particularly significant meaning when President Obama comes to this city, Nagasaki, and conveys it to the rest of the world from here.

Someone from South Korea asked me a question after my latest speech at the United Nations. “Don’t the hibakusha ask the United States to take responsibility for the atomic bomb it dropped?” I answered this question as follows: “As far as I know, many of the hibakusha are attaching top priority to how we can abolish nuclear weapons. They are thinking about what they can do for that purpose.”

President Obama’s visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be the first step toward thinking about what we can do together to abolish nuclear weapons. I think it will be the first step that the global community will take to share the reality of the atomic bombing and commence group work for abolishing nuclear weapons.

Inhumanity of Nuclear Weapons

Kumagai: Members of the global community have discussed the inhumanity of nuclear weapons repeatedly during the period from the last NPT Review Conference to the present. What is your view of the situation regarding this point?

Taue: How inhuman are nuclear weapons? What will they bring to humans? These are questions at the heart of the things that people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, including the hibakusha, have been putting to the public for many years. They are the basis for all their actions. We must keep attaching the greatest importance to efforts to communicate the reality of the atomic bombing and continue such activities in cooperation with people in other countries, in addition to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki proposed to the leaders of various nations can be seen as part of these initiatives.

The number of countries that sent delegates to the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, Austria in December 2014 was 158, the highest ever. Active discussions took place at the Conference. The number of countries that supported a joint statement declaring the inhumanity of nuclear weapons to the public and asking for the cessation of their use published during the latest NPT Review Conference reached 159, which was also the largest number ever. Furthermore, the number of countries that supported a written oath for nuclear disarmament proposed by Austria grew from about 70 before the Conference to 107 at its closing point. As these developments suggest, there have been powerful moves. Actions over the inhumanity of nuclear weapons are strengthening in the global community for sure.

Participants in the latest Review Conference failed to adopt a final document, but I feel that world opinion against nuclear powers and a global network against their use are becoming stronger and stronger.



My impression is that public opinion has also started to change in the United States. An atomic bomb exhibition is now in progress at the American University Museum in Washington D.C. As we clearly remember, opposition by veterans' groups virtually forced an atomic bomb exhibition to be cancelled when the National Air and Space Museum planned to hold it in 1995. The current atomic bomb exhibition is jointly sponsored by the American University, the city of Hiroshima and the city of Nagasaki. Judging from the media reports, conditions in the United States are changing. The reality of the atomic bombing is beginning to reach more people there. I have a solid feeling that this is taking place.

An Approach Called Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones

Kumagai: Mayor Taue, you referred to nuclear weapon-free zones in your annual peace declaration on August 9 and your speech at the latest NPT Review Conference. What does this concept mean?

Taue: We have been taking up nuclear weapon-free zones as a subject in our peace declarations for more than ten years now.

A-bomb survivors have also appealed to the public for the abolition of nuclear weapons in many countries in the past. In many cases, however, they have faced a significant dilemma. People overseas have said things like, "You say that, but your own country is protected under the nuclear umbrella, isn't it?"

Japan is a country that understands the inhumanity of nuclear weapons extremely well. In spite of this, Japan cannot be at the forefront of efforts to abolish nuclear weapons because of the reality of remaining under the nuclear umbrella. I'm promoting an approach called a nuclear weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia to the public partly because of my idea of what Japan should do to spearhead such efforts.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki have done five things up to this point. First, we have worked to make the reality of the atomic bombing known. Second, we have tried to correct the gaps. Such activities include our protests against nuclear weapons tests. Third, we have attempted to show the next step. Fourth, we have attempted to expand the networks. Fifth, we have continued our efforts to present a goal.

A treaty for nuclear disarmament and the concept of a nuclear weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia have been the examples of the third thing we have done, "showing the next step."

Nuclear powers and countries under the nuclear umbrella have kept insisting on a step-by-step approach. They have argued that "step by step is the only realistic approach," rejecting a treaty for nuclear disarmament and the concept called a nuclear weapon-free zone. But the reality is that they have not been able to take any steps toward the abolition of nuclear weapons at all. While they are at a standstill, new countries hoping to have nuclear weapons are emerging. The possibility of terrorist organizations owning nuclear weapons is also increasing. We must think about more



realistic ways of reducing risks. Such thought has given rise to moves for establishing a treaty for nuclear disarmament as a comprehensive approach and the concept of a nuclear weapon-free zone where countries without nuclear weapons restrict the use, threat and introduction of nuclear weapons by nuclear powers.

The establishment of a treaty for nuclear disarmament does not mean that nuclear weapons will disappear tomorrow. A step-by-step approach will be necessary for abolishing nuclear weapons in any event. The two ideas are not contradictory for that reason. I do not believe that we can move forward unless we go beyond the confrontation of these two approaches. In that sense, too, I believe that the concept of a nuclear weapon-free zone is one of the finest approaches that a nation under the nuclear umbrella, such as Japan, is able to take.

I believe that Japan can exercise global leadership for abolishing nuclear weapons by taking steps based on the idea of creating a non-nuclear umbrella in this region, Northeast Asia, and guaranteeing safety under that umbrella.

In the speech I delivered at the NPT Review Conference, I divided the countries represented at the conference into nuclear powers, countries without nuclear weapons that depend on the nuclear umbrella, and countries without nuclear weapons that do not rely on the umbrella, and called on each of these three groups of nations separately. In particular, I reminded countries that depend on the nuclear umbrella, including Japan, of the need to expand the non-nuclear umbrella called a nuclear weapon-free zone.

In the region of Northeast Asia where we live, there is tension over the nuclear weapons that North Korea has. In my speech, I asked the Japanese government to “approach South Korea and North Korea and make efforts to establish a Northeast Asia nuclear weapon-free zone for the stability of Northeast Asia.”

Various dialogues and new movements for peace are born in the course of realizing a nuclear weapon-free zone. That is another important point. A nuclear weapon-free zone in Latin America took a period of about thirty years to realize after the idea had gotten off the drawing board. Dialogues and security frameworks for the idea have emerged over time. It will take a certain period of time in Northeast Asia as well. That is why we need to start early and begin examinations. I believe that we should immediately start calling on countries in Northeast Asia to commence actions in that direction at least.

The Japanese government has also touched on a nuclear weapon-free zone in recent documents published in the name of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mongolia, a country that has declared itself a nuclear-weapon free zone, has also shown moves to cooperate with Japan. There was also a report made to the National Council of Japan Nuclear-Free Local Authorities that stated that the number of local government chiefs who provide their signatures has been increasing. I believe that all these changes mean that we need to continue making steady efforts. As the Mayor of Nagasaki, an A-bombed city, I would like to work hard so that countries in Northeast Asia move in the direction of joining each other under the non-nuclear umbrella.



‘Small Diplomacy’ with a Big Meaning

Kumagai: We believe that building relationships of trust through exchanges between local governments can be an approach in this region, where relationships between nations tend to grow stagnant. What do you think about this?

Taue: In terms of the five things I talked about earlier, such an approach corresponds to the fourth one, “expanding networks.” Diplomacy is considered to be an item under exclusive state control. But that is so-called “big diplomacy.” Only nations can perform negotiations such as the conclusion of treaties and the establishment of various arrangements among themselves. In the meantime, there is also “small diplomacy,” the kind of diplomacy in which relationships of mutual trust grow deeper through exchanges between cities or citizens across national borders. Such diplomacy may be “small,” but it can be a large force that restores relationships between nations when they change for the worse or grow weak. It can be a force transcending nations that also shapes international opinion. I believe that is the significance of diplomacy by cities and activities, such as sister city exchanges and Mayors for Peace conferences.

Ninety percent of local governments in Japan have declared themselves to be nuclear-free cities or peace cities to date. The number of local governments in Japan participating in the National Council of Japan Nuclear-Free Local Authorities has surpassed 300. Only local governments close to the citizens can keep communicating the importance of peace in cooperation with the citizens. Local governments can do this not only in Japan but also all around the world. When we look around the world, we can find many local governments and their heads working for the cause of peace with true enthusiasm.

Among those local governments, I believe that municipalities where an atomic bomb was dropped have a special mission to perform. Their mission is to never again allow anyone in the world to experience the calamities caused by a nuclear weapon that they have gone through. That is our root thought. Nagasaki and Hiroshima are cities that know best that having or using a nuclear weapon is an absolute evil that should never be an option. That is why we are making various proposals and taking various approaches in connection with nuclear weapons beyond the framework of a municipality. That is why we present our position of protest properly, as we have always done in the past, when we find the Japanese government attempting to go in the opposite direction. That is our mission as a city that has experienced nuclear bombing.

Speaking of proposals, Nagasaki University opened the Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition (RECNA) three years ago. Nagasaki had been relatively weak in the areas of policy proposals and youth participation in peace activities. The Center added those two pieces to our city and generated a flow that is very positive.

In my opinion, exchanges between local governments and non-governmental exchanges will increase in importance from now on. The number of passenger ships arriving at Nagasaki Port



from China and South Korea has also been rising. Their number almost doubled year on year to somewhere between 130 and 150 this year.

It is very important to continue honest exchanges with China and South Korea. The council of mayors in Nagasaki Prefecture held a meeting in Pusan, South Korea last year. It was the first attempt of its kind. The council initially planned to hold the meeting in Tsushima City, but the Mayor of Tsushima proposed that we meet in South Korea. The newly inaugurated Mayor of Pusan and the head of the local ward kindly came to the meeting, enabling those of us from Nagasaki Prefecture to have exchanges with them.

Nagasaki has been a contact point for foreign trade since the Edo period (1603–1867). As such a point, Nagasaki boasts a long history of exchanges with China as well. There is even a consulate general of China in our city, which exercises jurisdiction over Nagasaki Prefecture only. As this fact demonstrates, we have maintained exchanges with China without any interruptions. We sustained exchanges with China, instead of terminating them completely, even when relations between Japan and China changed for the worse. We would like to place great value on the presence of such a foothold for exchanges in our city.

The exhibits at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum are explained in Chinese and Korean, in addition to English. I believe that people who visit Nagasaki for sightseeing purposes can understand the reality of the atomic bombing by visiting the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. There are also moves being made in Northeast Asia, such as nuclear testing by North Korea. The road to a nuclear weapon-free zone is long. But I firmly believe that if everyone learns the reality of the atomic bombing, they will understand that nuclear weapons should never be used.

Young Generations as a Source of Hope

Kumagai: In Nagasaki, the members of the young generations are taking actions in ways that are very positive. This is the impression we have.

Taue: Young people are teaching us more things these days than what we are informing them about. (Taue laughs.) There is this committee in Nagasaki that drafts our annual peace declaration. One young member of this committee who joined it two years ago once said the following at a committee meeting: “I would ask you to teach us the facts to start with, instead of teaching us only the conclusion that nuclear weapons are no good. We want to think about nuclear weapons on our own with the facts as the starting point.” Other committee members, including myself, listened to this statement, nodding deeply in agreement. The remark made me really happy. I felt that this young committee member was dependable. There are many young people in Nagasaki who feel the same way.

Peace Ambassadors from Senior High Schools is a program that began in 1998, with nuclear weapons tests by India and Pakistan as a catalyst. We send delegates to the United Nations every year through this program. This year’s delegation will be the eighteenth. One teacher is said to have



written a model declaration in the belief that it would be hard for the members to draft a declaration when the members of the first delegation gathered. I heard that the high school delegates told the teacher that they wanted to change the model slightly. They reportedly removed all the words written by the teacher from the final version. (Tae laughs.) This episode taught me that the most important thing is the ability to think for ourselves.

A member of the Nagasaki Youth Delegation that took part in the NPT Review Conference also said the following: “We can build new relationships with various countries as members of a young generation.” I think that what this delegation member meant was that the people of his generation could have more honest, straightforward talks without the preconceived ideas that members of the older generations tend to have.

“Our power may be weak, but we are not powerless.” This expression is widely used today, but it was originally a mantra for a campaign launched by senior high school students to collect 10,000 signatures. One delegate taught me something important, saying, “Things become known if you communicate them.”

What we can do is to sow the “seeds” for thinking about peace. I believe that a time when people will think about peace on their own will come if we do that. It may not happen right away, but such a time will come someday for sure.

We will hold the International Youth Peace Forum in Nagasaki on August 5 and 6 of this year. We will invite children from 162 countries and regions around the world to attend the gathering. One child from each of these countries and regions will join the children from Nagasaki and Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture, to discuss peace together. Their discussion will also be moderated by a member of the young generation. I’m looking forward to seeing the chemical reactions that those children generate at the Forum, and I wonder what they will be like. Members of the Nagasaki Youth Delegation are positioning the opening ceremony for the International Youth Peace Forum as a starting point, rather than a goal. They are thinking about asking the participating children to return home with a guidebook for realizing peace and to spread information about peace activities in their respective countries and regions. The young people of Nagasaki are joining forces right now to produce this guidebook.

The hibakusha have attempted to inform the world about the reality of the atomic bombing for many years. They say that they have always shared what they went through, worrying about the possibility that their experiences might not be conveyed to the audience in the way they wanted. But they could tell from those senior high school students who began to take actions that their experiences have been properly conveyed to the young people. I believe that this was a truly delightful and encouraging discovery for the hibakusha.

We kicked off a project called “Handing down the Family Experiences of the Atomic Bombing from Generation to Generation” last year to support the testifying activities of the hibakusha, their family members, such as their children and grandchildren, and people close to the hibakusha. A-bomb survivors are dying one after another. In this environment, the members of the next generation and the generation after the next one must hand down the experiences of the hibakusha



from generation to generation. Family members and friends who are very close can provide first-person narratives, such as, “I felt this way when I heard about that experience.” Such first-person narratives have the strong power of communication.

There are many messages I would like to include in this year’s peace declaration on August 9. But what I would like to communicate the most through the peace declaration is the passing on of memories. I would like to call on people around the world to pass on these memories called the atomic bombing on the occasion of its seventieth anniversary. In my opinion, the sharing of the memories of the devastation that should never be repeated is a deterrent against war in the true sense of the word.

We can share our opinion that nuclear weapons should never be allowed to exist and that nuclear weapons should never be handed over to the next generation by coming into contact with the experiences of the hibakusha, however limited such contacts may be. I believe that this city, Nagasaki, is proving that right now. There are members of generations without war experience who can think on their own and act on their own ideas. They have begun to emerge. I believe that it is precisely such young people who embody hope for the future.

Kumagai: Thank you very much for taking the time to share your observations and opinions with us.

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Taue Tomihisa, Mayor of Nagasaki City

Born in 1956, Taue is the mayor of Nagasaki. He graduated from Kyushu University with a bachelor’s degree in law. Taue became the mayor of Nagasaki in 2007. He is currently serving his third term in this position.
