

## ‘The Ultimate Evil’: a Hiroshima survivor speaks

残虐非道な罪悪：広島生存者胸中を語る

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### 抄 録

二十世紀、世界中で少なくとも一億一千万人の人びとが、戦争のために命を失った。そして人類はその技術的才能を使って、われわれの住む地球を何度も何度も破壊できる武器、原爆を生み出した。何千何万と蓄積されたこの核兵器が、ますます多くの国々に拡散され、現代世界が直面する最大の問題を生み出している。広島・長崎を思うとき、多くの人びとの心に引き起こされる恐怖は、次第にボンヤリとかすんだものになりつつある一方、それが人生の主題となる大問題ではなく、単なる傍注のようなお添え物的存在だとしか考えない人びとも生まれてきている。

われわれは、原爆の積極的使用を合法化する人びとに反対する立場に立つことが出来るようになるために、その無差別殺戮の残酷な非人間性を思い起こす必要がある。多分これを成就する最善の方法は、その場に居合わせ、爆撃の効果を目撃し、多くの場合、解き放たれたその殺傷力の犠牲となった人びと、被爆者、の声に耳を傾けることである。この論文の主題は、2007年7月、広島原爆の生存者によって若い人びとに向けて与えられた証言を翻訳することである。62年を経過した今、生存者の中には、自分が目撃した出来事を語るため、世に姿を現すことに気が進まない人もいる。しかし、平和についてのそのメッセージを聞いてもらわなければならないと決意したのである。

**Key words** : Hiroshima, atomic bombing, survivor testimony

### Introduction

For the past sixty years the Chicago-based Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has used a Doomsday Clock to show how close humanity is to destroying itself. In 2007, which the Bulletin described as “the brink of a second nuclear age”<sup>1)</sup>, the clock hands moved forward to 5 minutes to midnight, the closest mankind has been to the point of self-destruction since 1984. The greatest threat is posed by nuclear weapons, with the two main nuclear powers, the United States and Russia —who together possess 26,000 of the world’s 27,000 nuclear warheads<sup>2)</sup>— ready to stage a nuclear attack within minutes. Since 2005 the Administration of President George Bush has had in place contingency plans for pre-emptive nuclear strikes on so-called “rogue states”, a reflection of the growing concern over North Korea’s nuclear testing and Iran’s possible ambitions to acquire nuclear weapon capabilities, and in July 2007 it set out its argument for a new nuclear warhead, the Reliable Replacement Warhead, stating that this was “critical to maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”<sup>3)</sup>. There are also fears over a possible nuclear terrorist attack should any of the substantial amounts of unsecured weapon-grade nuclear material distributed around the world get into unauthorized hands.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons, not only vertically (with more weapons being added to existing stockpiles) but horizontally (to new states) is among the most urgent challenges facing our planet. As well as Israel’s (undeclared) weapons and those held by India, Pakistan and North Korea, it has been suggested by Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, that up to thirty countries are capable of developing nuclear weapons on a short time scale<sup>4)</sup>.

Sixty-two years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki there would appear to be a collective amnesia or denial on the part of the nuclear powers about the lessons to be learned from the tragedy inflicted

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on those two cities. In Hiroshima alone, 140,000 people had died by the end of 1945 and an almost equal number had been exposed to the atom bomb's radiation. For these *hibakusha* there was the constant fear of contracting radiation sickness, and many succumbed to —and still suffer today from— leukemia, thyroid cancer and a range of other illnesses. However, the occupation forces initially suppressed the truth about the horrific effects of the bomb, and only after seven years did the Japanese public learn of the details<sup>5)</sup>. A similar suppression or denial was evident in the Smithsonian exhibition of 1995 marking the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombings. Under pressure from Congress, photographs showing the bomb damage inflicted on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were removed<sup>6)</sup>.

Ignorance of the horrendous nature of nuclear weapons appears to be spreading even within Japan, the only nation to suffer from their use. In a recent interview<sup>7)</sup>, Steven Leeper, Director of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, says that young Japanese “have only a minimum understanding of World War II and the atomic bombings”, an assertion that conforms to the notion of a growing “oblivion to the Hiroshima memory” advanced by Yuki Tanaka of the Hiroshima Peace Institute. Tanaka cites<sup>8)</sup> as evidence the sharp fall in the number of school excursions to Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Museum in recent years and the incidents of vandalism in which the paper cranes adorning the Children's Peace Monument inside the Peace Park were set on fire. These, he suggests, are indications that the fate of Hiroshima's victims is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the young.

It is against this backdrop that the voices of those who experienced or witnessed the world's first nuclear holocaust, the *hibakusha*, become of paramount importance. We need to hear what they saw and felt on that fateful day and let their message remind us of the moral indefensibility of the nuclear option. The urgency is compounded by their dwindling numbers. In the decade up to 2005, about 5,000 *hibakusha* are thought to have died each year<sup>9)</sup>, and their average age is now over 74. In his Peace Declaration of 2007 Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima, praises the courage of the *hibakusha* for having “continually spoken of experiences they would rather forget”<sup>10)</sup>, and he reasserts his conviction that they have effectively prevented a third use of nuclear weapons:

*[T]he hibakusha's will that the evil not be repeated has prevented the unleashing of this lunacy. Their determination to tell their story to the world, to argue eloquently that to use nuclear weapons is to doom the human race, and to show the use of nuclear weapons to be the ultimate evil has brought about this result. We owe our future and our children's future to them.*<sup>11)</sup>

The testimony of the *hibakusha* on the brutal consequences of a nuclear attack is perhaps needed now more than ever, in the light of recent Japanese government policy. This includes discussion on revising Japan's ‘peace constitution’ imposed by the occupation forces after World War II, in particular, Article 9 which renounces Japan's ability to wage war. Additionally, 2006 saw the enactment by the Japanese Diet of a law revising the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education. The new law emphasizes public spirit and tradition, expands the control of politicians over the schools, and is designed to instill patriotism in school children. At the same time, another law upgraded the status of the agency governing Japan's Self-Defence Forces into a ministry, possibly preparing the way for a greater deployment of military forces overseas. These political trends are seen by some as a gradual retreat from the liberal, pacifist values gained in the postwar years.

What follows is a translation from Japanese of testimony on the atomic bombing given by an 81 year-old female witness, Yoshiko Muneyasu. Her testimony was presented on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, in Osaka at a preparatory workshop for high school students intending to take part in the 2007 Hiroshima Pilgrimage. This event, sponsored by the Osaka Catholic Archdiocese's executive committee of the Hiroshima Peace Pilgrimage for

Youths, is just one example among many<sup>12)</sup> of the growing field of peace education with its aim of enhancing public awareness of the problems of war and peace and initiating change towards a more just and peaceful society<sup>13)</sup>.

Why has this eyewitness waited for sixty-two years to speak in public of her experiences? Her reluctance apparently stemmed from the fact that she was relatively unscathed —physically— by the bombing and felt that others, more severely affected, had a stronger right to testify to the indiscriminate cruelty of the atom bomb. The impetus behind her decision to speak out was in part her dismay at the continuing recourse to nuclear arms as a deterrent and a show of force. She was also keenly aware that the number of direct witnesses still able to speak of what they endured is declining.

The account that Mrs. Muneyasu gives of her personal experiences on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, and the few days following, is an account from memory: no historical sources were consulted. In spite —or perhaps because— of this, her words paint a powerful and moving picture of the horrors she encountered and convey an urgent plea from the heart for a world freed from the nuclear menace. This is a message which deserves a wider readership.

### Testimony of Yoshiko Muneyasu, aged 81

I think it is a regrettable state of affairs that, even now, sixty-two years after the end of World War Two, not only are there large quantities of nuclear weapons being held throughout the world, but both the number of weapons and the number of countries possessing them continue to increase little by little. However, my hope is reawakened and I feel a deep emotion and respect knowing that you and so many young people like you from various places inside and outside Japan are going to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to learn, to discover, to pray for peace and to make a fresh determination to achieve it.

While I have been encouraged to add my voice to the lucid voices of those who were living in Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bombing, I was hesitant to do this. This is the first time I have stood up in front of an audience. Nevertheless, allow me to read out to you what I recall of that time in this account of my limited experiences during the five or six days which followed the bombing.

Japan at that time was in the closing stages of the Fifteen-Year War<sup>14)</sup> and it was the fourth year since her entry into the Pacific War. One after another, the large cities had suffered great damage in air raids, the front-line army had been defeated and we had heard the sad news of Okinawa. Yet amid these strong signs of defeat, there were, oddly enough, a few cities which had escaped heavy air-raid damage: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kokura and others.

I was 19 at the time and working in the general affairs section of the accounting department at the Army Marine Command Headquarters. This looked out on to Ujina Port, four kilometres away from the centre of the explosion.

On the morning of August 6<sup>th</sup>, after the air-raid warning had been lifted and the skies over Hiroshima, eased of tension, were clear and fresh, who could have predicted that, a few minutes later, there would occur a disaster on a scale never experienced before?

During our outdoor morning assembly, right in the middle of our training exercise with bamboo spears, we saw a strange flash and at the same time got the order, “Everyone take cover!” Which came first, all of us rushing into the nearby air-raid shelter or hearing the ‘boom’ of the explosion? That’s how fast things happened.

How much time passed, I wonder, as we waited, our breathing restrained? And when the ‘all clear’ order was given and we crawled out of the shelter, what was this huge mushroom cloud which met our eyes? Below it was a scene of carnage impossible for the mind to comprehend. After briefly murmuring things like,

“Have they hit a gas tank?” the information we got next made us feel intuitively that these were abnormal circumstances. The headquarters was converted immediately into a first-aid station.

Inside the grounds there was a concrete building equipped with a large hall called the Hall of Triumph. All the sheets we had available were stretched out over the entire floor of this hall, and the seriously ill, their skin and clothes torn to shreds, were brought in on trucks. However, all the injured kept a tight grip on their emotions and obeyed the instructions to be quiet. Whether it was because they felt that they had finally escaped from hell or because their energy had been totally expended, none of those laid out on the hard floor complained of pain or heat. Their faces were swollen up to the size of volleyballs, their eyes and mouths stretched to mere slits, and their faint voices could just get out the appeal, “Water, please.”

The female staff members had been told to move quietly among these people, but we had been given strict orders: “Giving them water to drink will kill them. It’s absolutely forbidden.” So there was no way to respond to the sole request of these dying people. The only words of comfort we could give them were, “You’re thirsty, aren’t you? But they say it will be bad for you if you drink water now. Please try to be patient just a little bit longer. I’m sorry....”

If I can refer now to my personal situation on this day, the 6th, both my family members and my house, 1.5 kilometres from ground zero, were atom-bombed. Those inside the house at that time were my mother and three relatives who had lost their house through a building demolition order and had been evacuated to ours. My father, mobilized by the city authorities, had gone out under the blazing sun to work on organizing the building evacuations.

With clothes for washing in her arms, my mother had just stepped out into the corridor when she was knocked down by the blast from the atomic bomb. Pieces of wall and rubble rained down all over her and for a short while it seems that she lost consciousness. When she came to, she found that she was pinned under the flattened house and could not move the lower half of her body. As she looked in the direction of where the light was coming through, she saw beyond it a fire flickering. Desperately, and resigned to injuries, she used all her strength to push aside one piece of plaster after another, and, twisting her body, she finally managed to escape. In a loud voice she kept calling out my aunt’s name and that of my cousin’s wife and of her baby, but there was no response.

Having thrown off his smouldering outer clothing burnt by the heat ray, my father arrived home wearing just a pair of underpants. There was a thin, purplish red discolouration on the upper half of his body, yet he appears to have remained conscious and with the strength to walk.

They had to get away from this place without delay, so they pulled on a sheet whose edge was visible beneath the rubble, wrapped it around Father, slipped onto their feet some sandals that were scattered about and began to escape in the direction of the sea. On the way they were picked up by an army truck which dropped them off at a first-aid station. The place had run out of medicines, though, so they had to carry on a little further and call at a relative whose house had escaped collapse. Here they dressed Father in a yukata<sup>15)</sup> they were given. After that, hearing that they could get medical treatment there, my parents stumbled along hand in hand and finally made it south to Ujina Port.

The first-aid station at Army Marine Command Headquarters was already full, and instructions were given that only the seriously injured were to be taken by boat to Ninoshima inside the harbour for treatment, so Mother was not allowed to accompany Father. Her face still caked with blood, she stopped by the place I was working, inside the same grounds, to tell me— “I’ve sent Father to Ninoshima. Tonight I’ll stay with a relative in Ujina.” Then she left.

When evening came we were instructed, “Women with a place to stay should return home.” That night I stayed with a relative, and when I went to work the following day, the 7th, the majority of the patients of the

previous day had already died and there was no sign of them. I was shocked beyond words when I found out how their remains had undergone prompt mass cremation in a manner unimaginable in peacetime.

The day after that, the 8th, I was allowed a day off work, and, using the roads and fire-devastated ruins as landmarks, Mother and I struggled to reach the garden of our house. As we looked out over the grey burnt-out landscape stretching far away into the distance, all that remained were concrete buildings dotted here and there. It was like a ghostly world of death. Acting on what my mother remembered, we started to search the place where it was thought my aunt, my cousin's wife and her baby had been sitting—the three who had been living with us at the time of the atomic bombing. There we discovered several hairpins fused together. It was a heart-breaking experience.

Among the burnt ruins there hung in the air a peculiar, offensive smell which the local people described as "the stink of the atom bomb". That smell remained for several months, while the groans of the wounded and the dead were burnt into my memory.

On the bank of a nearby river was the pitiful sight of a corpse, bright red and swollen, and floating face down in the water, the remains of a man probably left behind by the first-aid workers.

In the sports ground of Hiroshima University of Literature and Science (Hiroshima University), not far from our house, several dozen small huts had been erected, and, in them, worn out bodies were resting, but their burn injuries were crawling with maggots and their condition was a living hell for them. At the sight of an old man from the neighbourhood, simply moved to tears and murmuring, "My wife's dead", there was nothing I could do for him but shed my tears along with his.

Finally, on the 9th, family members were also allowed to board the boats going to Ninoshima. There we peered at the faces of the people stretched out on the floor of the plain wooden building, until we were advised to call out Father's name in a loud voice. This we did, going from room to room, but there was no answer. In the last room was kept a register of the names of those who had died, and here at last we came across Father's full name. The only thing left of his, which they handed over to us in a thin, light brown envelope, was some of his hair.

I heard that at Ninoshima first-aid station, too, half the patients died on that first evening, the 6th, and Father was one of them, but when I heard how, here also, their mass cremations processed the corpses in batches—digging a big hole in the ground, throwing the dead bodies into it, pouring oil over them and burning them—even just imagining the way in which they did it made me shudder.

Mother had thought it was for the best to request medical treatment for Father and say goodbye to him like that, but her feelings of self-reproach at not being able to care for him in his final moments were not easily soothed.

On the next day, the 10th, after being able to confirm the death of a near relative, I went to work, but at the first-aid station of Command Headquarters on this, the 5th day since the bombing, there was no sign of the severely wounded people who had been kept there, and I settled back into my work amid an oppressive atmosphere.

Does mankind, created by God but forgetful of His will, want to rule the world in place of God? The depths of limitless sin lead ultimately to a world of death, and I felt that Hiroshima had caught a glimpse of this world.

Even though we can say the militarism of those days and the National Mobilization Law led to a situation in which criticism in speech or behaviour was not permitted, I myself was one of those who earnestly took part in the war.

As someone who by chance experienced the atom bomb from a comparatively safe location, I feel very sorry that I cannot comprehend even one ten-thousandth of the suffering of those who were near the centre

of the explosion at the time, of those who died after groaning in unbearable agony for so many days, and of those who over so many years have had to suffer the anxiety over after-effects and the struggle against prejudice.

The words inscribed on the atomic bomb monument to console the souls of the dead express the spirit of Hiroshima. "Please rest peacefully; for we will not repeat the evil." I pray that these words become the spirit of the whole world. With this resolve etched onto my heart —"Never again shall nuclear warfare be repeated"— and praying ardently for the peace of the Lord, I ask to live each day turning back to God and seeking His guidance.

Testimony on the atomic bombing given by Yoshiko Muneyasu at the preparatory workshop of the Hiroshima Pilgrimage for junior and senior high school students, given on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, at Kitano Catholic Church, Osaka, Japan.

#### Notes

- 1) See <http://www.thebulletin.org/minutes-to-midnight/timeline.html>
- 2) See Carnegie Endowment for International Peace at <http://www.ProliferationNews.org>
- 3) James E. Doyle, US National Security and Nuclear Weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/npp/>
- 4) See <http://www.thebulletin.org/minutes-to-midnight/board-statements.html>
- 5) Kuroyoshi Kazuo *et al.*, *No More Hiroshima, Nagasaki* (Tokyo: Nippontoshō Center, 2005), p. 5
- 6) Douglas Roche, *The Human Right to Peace* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2003), p. 94
- 7) The Peace Maker, *Kansai Time Out No. 366*, pp. 9–10, August 2007
- 8) Tanaka Yuki, Even in Japan People Are Forgetting the Memory of Hiroshima, at <http://www.hnn.us/articles/10167.html>
- 9) *Ibid.*
- 10) 2007 Hiroshima Peace Declaration. Available at <http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/declaration/English/2007/index.html>
- 11) 1999 Hiroshima Peace Declaration. Available at <http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/declaration/English/1999/index.html>
- 12) For example, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Study courses taught at several universities in Japan and abroad.
- 13) Ian M. Harris and Mary Lee Morrison, *Peace Education*, (2nd edition), (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003)
- 14) Initiated by Japan's invasion of northeastern China (the Mukden or Manchurian Incident) in September 1931
- 15) A light cotton kimono worn in summer or used as a bathrobe