

Speech at the General Assembly of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities

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Tadatashi Akiba, Mayor

City of Hiroshima

Thank you for your kind introduction, Mr. Ken Wyatt. Lord Provost Mosson, Moderator John Miller, Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honor and privilege for me to speak here among fellow mayors and peace workers with kindred spirit who share the basic goals. It is also timely that we share our concerns about what is happening in the world after September 11.

Citizens of Hiroshima watched the most inhumane and tragic terrorist attacks in New York and in Washington, D.C. with horror, disbelief, anger, frustration and shock. I do not have to repeat those emotions in more detail because you yourselves experienced them as well. Certainly we cannot condone such despicable acts which targeted human frailty and vulnerability.

Actually, people all over the world reacted more or less this way. However, hibakusha, a Japanese word for the survivors of the atomic bombings, have an additional layer in their minds. Whenever they see catastrophes and disasters they recall their own August 6th fifty-six years ago.

I do not need to tell you the details of the destruction on that day. Rather, one point I would like to emphasize in this connection is my observation that it is an essential part of human nature to help those in distress. Many people came into the central areas of Hiroshima right after the bombing to help the injured and those in need. All of us want to help. And I must mention especially that hibakusha and their friends also want to help. For example, at the time of the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, hibakusha and citizens of Hiroshima organized relief teams to help the victims and restore the city. After September 11th, Hiroshima citizens reacted in a similar fashion. Some people have flown to New York to participate in reconstruction efforts and others are raising funds for the same purpose.

Many of us feel that it is time for us to reciprocate. Since we tend to forget what happened almost half a century ago and since young people have not heard the story, let me explain our "debt" to New York.

First of all, let me note with a renewed feeling of gratitude that the reconstruction of our city was made possible by generous help from all over the world, in addition to the heroic efforts of Hiroshima citizens.

In fact, the help we received from New York City and New Yorkers remains vivid in our hearts. The August 31 issue of the New Yorker magazine was entirely devoted to a report of the tragedy by Mr. John Hersey. As a result, we received thousands of letters encouraging Hiroshima citizens and generous offers of assistance in rebuilding the city.

The tireless work of Mr. Norman Cousins, who was chief editor of the Saturday Review magazine at the time, shines among countless other warm acts of humanity. He created a program of finding “spiritual parents” “who “adopted” the orphans who had lost their parents, family and relatives. There were many orphans because children had been segregated to the rural areas to avoid air raids which had been targeted at cities where adults remained to continue their work..

The “Hiroshima Maidens” project, made it possible for the twenty five girls who had been selected to receive operations at Mt. Sinai Hospital to remove keloid scars. The Operations improved the girls’ appearances, but more importantly gave them a new hope and confidence for the future.

We expressed our gratitude by asking him to become an honorary citizen, but I would like to express the same degree of gratitude to all New Yorkers and American citizens as well as people all over the world who helped us recover.

These are human reactions and I would like to mention one important fact related to this. I believe that it is through these humane exchanges that so many hibakusha (the Japanese word for survivors of the Atomic bombings) have successfully severed the chain of hatred and violence and have been able to work with people all over the world, including many American citizens, toward abolition of nuclear weapons and creation of true world peace.

In Hiroshima as well as in Japan, many people are concerned about what might happen next. There are concerns about retaliations on both sides. There are fears that a new war might start. There are concerns that more innocent people might die, especially women and children. There are also concerns about the 150,000 Afghan people who, some experts predict, might die during winter because of severe cold and lack of food.

These concerns and many more I have noticed stem from humanness. They are expressions of

humanity. At the same time, they are also related to what we hear quite often these days: retaliation. As a matter of fact, I believe that “retaliation” is an essential link between the terrorist attacks on September 11 and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Let me try to offer an explanation for this statement.

The first observation I have to make is the prototype of American thinking. I know the subject fairly well because I lived in the United States nearly twenty years. What I would like to point out is that the basic framework of the world most Americans carry is that of World War II. More specifically the most glorious triumph in the international arena in American history starts with Pearl Harbor and end with the atomic bombs.

In other words, Americans consider the Pearl Harbor the worst possible thing that could happen on earth. It is the ultimate evil comparable to the concept of the absolute zero degree in temperature. Nothing could come below it.

Within that framework, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are considered noble acts that rectified that injustice. For them it is God that gave Americans the bombs to get rid of the evil. And even today Americans tend to look at world events in this framework. As a result, retaliation is a natural choice in American psyche.

However, I am not trying to be harsh on Americans. When you think about it, the entire human history is a series of “retaliations” with each side asserting their absolute legitimacy and justice. However, when we begin to test the legitimacy of such a statement we realize that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to trace the chain back to the very beginning of “retaliations” and determine which side is right. We cannot know the facts in most instances. We cannot make accurate judgments or even sort out the relevant facts. One thing that is certain is that many lives had been lost, tragedies after tragedies accumulated, and uncountable amount of sufferings ensued.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hibakusha did not choose the path of retaliation. They chose the opposite. The big question is why.

I intend to offer my answer in the rest of my talk. But before I start my explanation, there are a couple of things I would like to mention.

One is that we should not take hibakusha for granted. Because their voices have been strong and clear for over half a century, we tend to think that they were always there and they will forever be

with us. We assume that there was no other possibility. It seems to me that we may not have appreciated the importance of their message and their existence fully.

Let me propose a thought experiment just to make this point. Suppose they had chosen a path of retaliation advocating that nuclear weapons are the best solution for solving international conflicts. There have been many instances when the use of nuclear weapons had been discussed: Korea, Vietnam and Kosovo come to mind immediately. Certainly on one of these occasions, hibakusha's urging would have guaranteed a third use of nuclear weapons. I seriously doubt if we would be here, had that been a reality.

Another point I would like to make is that it was not easy for hibakusha to come to the conclusion of non-retaliation. In order to appreciate hibakusha fully we need to understand the nature and the essence of the ordeal they went through. I will leave it to a later occasion to do explain the details of their ordeal, but again let me simply add that at the end they rose above that ordeal.

If it is human to "retaliate" as some people claim, then I could insist that they became super-human. However, it is more accurate to describe what happened after August 6, 1945 by saying that they continued to be human.

Actually I am already beginning to answer the big question of why which I posed earlier.

In the Peace Declaration of 1999 I looked back at the footsteps of hibakusha and emphasized three of their accomplishments. First is the fact that they continued to be human under the circumstances in which no one would have blamed them had they chosen death. To understand this one has to realize that atomic bombs literally created the hell on earth. That hell is often described as a situation in which the survivor envied the dead. As a matter of fact, there are witness accounts of many who committed suicide soon after they found out that they had survived.

In a situation like this it took courage to live. To continue to be alive and human was a struggle beyond our imagination. But most hibakusha who had survived did live. That is why they say that no one else should go through the same experience. "No one" includes President Truman, those who invented the bombs and dropped them as well as any other human beings on earth.

Such an attitude precludes any possibility of retaliation. In addition, to make sure that this message is heard and understood on a more concrete level hibakusha strongly advocated the abolition of nuclear weapons from the surface of the earth.

The second accomplishment I mentioned in the Peace Declaration is that this message together with persistent efforts of hibakusha and others has prevented a third use of nuclear weapons. This was made possible because the message was universal. It had been shared and amplified by those with kindred spirits all over the world, and most notably by all of you in this room and those who have been active in Mayors for Peace and Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

The universal appeal of the message, “no one else should go through the same experience” stems from the fact that it is reasonable and rational. It falls in the category of ordinary common sense. Let me contrast this statement against a similar attitude which some people claim is “human nature”: “I will show you.” Or to be more prosaic, “Since I have suffered so much, you will have to suffer as much.”

I will only add a couple of questions to this. Is this reaction rational? Is it reasonable? Doesn't this increase the total amount of suffering in the entire population of the world?

Hibakusha are not a special group of people. They are just ordinary people who happened to live in certain cities at the time. And yet, they rose to a lofty height and from that vantage point have sent us the message that will guide us through the 21st century. For that matter, it is gratifying to notice that many more people all over the world who came to the same conclusion through different paths. This realization also implies that perhaps there are more pains and sufferings in the world unbeknownst to us and that at the same time many people are capable of meeting big challenges. I believe that this is a proof that left alone, when we, human beings, face a challenge or an ordeal such as the atomic bombing we reach the natural and human conclusion. Perhaps that is the essence of human nature.

In this connection let me thank the City of Manchester and Lord Mayor John Smith for dedicating a plaque of friendship and peace on the occasion of my visit to the city and for quoting a passage from the Peace Declaration of this year on that occasion. Let me quote that passage here.

We believe that humanity means our willingness to listen to the voices of all sentient beings. Humanity also means nurturing children with loving care. It means valuing reconciliation in creating the human family's common future. It means rejecting violence and reaching peaceful agreements through the power of reason and conscience. Only humanity can assure the abolition of nuclear weapons; only humanity can ensure that nuclear weapons, once eliminated, are never re-invented.

The hibakusha's third achievement lies in their representing the new worldview as engraved on the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims and articulated in the Japanese Constitution. The wording on the Cenotaph reads as follows: Please rest peacefully, for we will not repeat the evil.

Actually, the subject, we, is missing in the sentence because of the grammatical structure of the Japanese language. The person standing in front of the Cenotaph must supply the subject. The only requirement is that it is the first person. Many of us read the second part as the following pledge: We, the entire humankind, will not repeat the evil.

Such a reading stems from the realization that our goal cannot be accomplished unless the entire humanity put the resources together. This problem cannot be solved by pitting we against them.

But when the cenotaph was constructed in 1952 there was controversy. Some people argued that it was the United States that used the terrible weapon. According to their logic, therefore, we are the victims and hence the conclusion: Why should we apologize for being bombed, murdered and maimed? However, the overwhelming majority supported the present phrase.

This decision was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that one hundred and fifty years ago, retaliation was obligatory for a samurai, a feudal knight in Japan. He had to seek the perpetrator of a murder against his father or other family members and test his fate by fighting a duel.

It is important that we choose a word to this new world view of hibakusha. Non-retaliation or non-revenge may be appropriate. However, in last year's Peace Declaration I used the term reconciliation instead to describe what I have been describing. This year I have used the term humanity for the same purpose. Either way, there are a few important ingredients which I would like to emphasize.

One is the realization that we cannot change history. We can rewrite it, but that does not change what actually happened at all. All we can change is the future. By deciding a wise course now we can avoid catastrophes in the future. By working together we can build a wonderful world for all the children of tomorrow no matter where they may live. Actually, I believe we have the responsibility to work together to create a bright common future for the entire human family. Nobody can or should abrogate this responsibility. This responsibility is absolute despite the differences of opinion about our past, or I should perhaps say because of the differences that exist. By working together to create the common future, we gain some kind of trust in each other even if

that trust does not exist beforehand.

The second ingredient I would like to emphasize is reason and conscience. These qualities are central in what makes us human. We should rely on the best among the best of us. One prominent accomplishment throughout human history is the creation of the legal system. We should strengthen that system. One concrete proposal might be the creation of the International Criminal Court. The International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia already exists. With a little more efforts we can establish a permanent court system.

The third ingredient is the concept of the civil society and civil organizations. Our goal can be summarized as an effort to create a truly civil society on a worldwide scale. To this end, the role of local authorities, which are fine examples of civil organizations, is of crucial importance. We need to make organizations such as the Nuclear Free Local Authorities and the Mayors for Peace even more active by utilizing various means including information technology.

The fourth and final ingredient I would like to emphasize is education. Hiroshima is trying to establish courses on the experience and meaning of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in major universities of the world right now with the cooperation of many universities and academic institutions.

Education on tolerance, carried out by many people as well, has much in common with courses on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We would also like to reach more children through a more systematic efforts focusing on the story of Sadako Sasaki. And there are much more we can do in this area.

In closing I would like to pray that hibakusha's message is shared by the world. I would also like to reconfirm our resolve that we work together to eliminate all nuclear weapons from this earth and create true world peace.

Thank you.