

Statement by Rika Watanabe, International Coordinator, Peace Boat  
to the Fourth Meeting of the International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without  
Nuclear Weapons  
May 21, 2024

On behalf of Japan-based international NGO Peace Boat, working since 1983 with nuclear impacted communities in Japan and around the world, here I would like to emphasize the importance of assistance to victims of nuclear weapons and of creating a firm mechanism of international cooperation for that purpose. In this process, the voices of survivors and impacted communities must be fully heard, and their rights and dignity protected.

This belief is based on Peace Boat's decades of experience working with over 170 Hibakusha, atomic bomb survivors, and together calling for nuclear abolition in around 100 cities in more than 60 countries through the "Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World: Peace Boat Hibakusha Project." This project is now traveling with 3 Hibakusha and 1 downwinder, a survivor of nuclear weapons testing, from the United States.

As director of this project, I also travelled together on the ship with them for a month visiting several ports in Asia and Africa, and just came back. During the time with the Hibakusha, including a courtesy visit to the President of Seychelles, I was strongly reminded how the Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki of 1945 have been courageously and tirelessly giving their testimonies for nearly 80 years, in solidarity with many people affected in various other stages of the nuclear chain, including Indigenous people. It was their desire, their personal stories and their sorrows that created the global momentum which led to the Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. At the same time, however, I was also reminded that the time we can hear from them first-hand is limited.

In order to assist the victims and pass on the legacy of nuclear weapons, I would like to emphasize two things. First is that the harm caused by radiation is lifelong. The risk of low-dose exposure to radiation should not be downplayed, and the impact of internal exposure should also be considered. Children who were orphaned by the atomic bombs experienced difficulties in their lives, and women particularly suffered discrimination. The Second point to emphasize is that the victim assistance must be for a broad range of victims. Many such people may belong to marginalized communities within their own countries, and this has been further concealed under systems of power such as colonialism and racism.

To this end, we welcome the adoption of the first ever UN General Assembly resolution last December titled "Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons," promoting victim assistance and environmental remediation to states affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, which was supported by an overwhelming majority of the UN Member States. We commend the efforts of the co-sponsors of the resolution, including Kiribati and Kazakhstan, the Co-chairs of the TPNW Working Group on victim assistance and environmental remediation.

We propose that the International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without Nuclear Weapons acknowledges this UN resolution and encourages governments to promote the implementation of victim assistance and environmental remediation. For nuclear-armed states, this is an essential part of their accountability. We also emphasize the importance of

a victim-centered approach in designing and implementing such measures. In other words, victims of all stages of the nuclear weapons cycle and all those who regard themselves as victims should be fully represented and engaged in those processes. Japanese civil society organizations and practitioners are ready to help with our experiences, including the efforts of the Hibakusha to advocate for and obtain their rights to health and livelihood.

Members of the International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without Nuclear Weapons (IGEP), please encourage the governments of the world, like Hibakusha,

- 1) to discuss nuclear issues based on the humanitarian consequences learned from the real voices of the Hibakusha;
- 2) to remember that the health hazards, human rights violations and disproportionate gender impacts of nuclear weapons, nuclear testing and uranium mining are serious problems that continue to this day;
- 3) to find a way towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, not nuclear deterrence; and
- 4) to take concrete steps for victim assistance and environmental remediation.

However steep the road to nuclear abolition may be, the suffering that Hibakusha in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and around the world, continue to be forced to endure can hardly be compared to the difficulties in the nuclear disarmament debate.

Knowing their suffering, we cannot just sit here and hope that nuclear weapons will be eliminated eventually. We hope that you, along with civil society, will lead the world from here from this moment.