



18 June 2020

Her Excellency Ms. Mette Frederiksen
Prime Minister
Kingdom of Denmark

Your Excellency,

This August will mark 75 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I am writing to you as an atomic bomb survivor of Hiroshima and an active member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 2017 Nobel Peace Laureate. Atomic bomb survivors are urging all world leaders to reflect on the catastrophic harm that nuclear weapons inflict and to commit to eliminate them as a matter of urgency.

As a 13-year-old schoolgirl, I witnessed my city of Hiroshima blinded by the flash, flattened by the hurricane-like blast, incinerated in the heat of 4,000 degrees Celsius, and contaminated by the radiation of one atomic bomb. A bright summer morning turned to dark twilight with smoke and dust rising in the mushroom cloud, dead and injured covering the ground, begging desperately for water and receiving no medical care at all. The spreading firestorm and the foul stench of burnt flesh filled the air.

Miraculously, I was rescued from the rubble of a collapsed building, about 1.8 kilometres from ground zero. Most of my classmates in the same room were burned to death alive. I can still hear their voices calling their mothers and God for help. As I escaped with two other surviving girls, we saw a procession of ghostly figures slowly shuffling from the centre of the city. Grotesquely wounded people, whose clothes were tattered, or who were made naked by the blast. They were bleeding, burnt, blackened and swollen. Parts of their bodies were missing, flesh and skin hanging from their bones, some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands, and some with their stomachs burst open, with their intestines hanging out.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, many thousands more would die, often in random and mysterious ways, from the delayed effects of radiation. Still to this day, radiation is killing survivors. Every person who died had a name. Every person was loved by someone.

In our struggle for survival, rebuilding lives out of the ashes, we survivors, or 'hibakusha', became convinced that no human being should ever have to repeat our experience of the inhumane, immoral, and cruel atomic bombing, and that our mission is to warn the world about the reality of nuclear dangers and to help people understand the ultimate evil of nuclear weapons. We have a moral imperative to abolish nuclear arsenals, before they are used again, by accident or by design. With this conviction we have been speaking out around the world for the past seven decades for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

Most recently, it is ICAN that has brought hope to the world. As you would recall, 122 states voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations on 7 July 2017. For me and so many other survivors of the atomic bombings, this was a moment of great joy and renewed optimism. It marked the beginning of the end of the most horrific weapons ever used in war or tested on earth and underwater.

When I travelled to Oslo later that year for a ceremony to jointly accept the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to ICAN for our work to bring this important treaty into being, I commented that all responsible, right-minded leaders will sign and ratify the treaty, and history will judge harshly those who do not. I am pleased to note that the treaty is now three-quarters of the way to attaining the 50 ratifications needed for entry into force. I look forward to celebrating when we reach that milestone in the coming months.

I hope that Denmark will soon take the necessary steps to become a state party to this landmark treaty and work to bring the era of nuclear weapons to a permanent end. Nuclear weapons are not a necessary evil, they are the ultimate evil, and the theory of “nuclear deterrence”, to which Denmark subscribes, serves only as a deterrent to disarmament. It also risks inciting proliferation by ascribing value to nuclear weapons. Through your alliance arrangements, Denmark is contributing to global nuclear dangers, and I urge you to chart a new course. There is no legal impediment to becoming a state party to this treaty. It is rather a moral and humanitarian imperative.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons embodies the commitment of the international community to ensure that no other cities ever suffer the same fate as mine. As the coronavirus pandemic has so starkly demonstrated, greater international cooperation to address all major threats to the health and welfare of humankind is urgently needed. Paramount among these threats is the threat of nuclear war. The treaty is a torch that allows us to follow each other out of the dark night of nuclear terror.

I urge you to honour the victims and survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as all who have been affected by nuclear testing, particularly indigenous people across the world, by taking action to become a state party without delay.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.



Setsuko Thurlow (Ms.)
International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons