



Dr Tilman Ruff reads JPPNW message at Nagasaki Day rally

Date: 9 August 2002

Author: Kenjiro Yokoro, MD
Japanese Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

From the Desk of Kenjiro Yokoro, MD
Japanese Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War
c/o Hiroshima Prefectural Medical Association
1-1-1, Kannon Honmachi
Nishi-ku, Hiroshima City
JAPAN
E-mail: jppnw@hiroshima.med.or.jp

August 1, 2002

Appeal from Hiroshima

The summer of 1945 is seared in my memory.

I was a young medical student then. On August 9, just three days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, I was dispatched there to help the victims for the next four weeks. Never have I felt so helpless.

I was stunned by the devastation I saw. Nothing in my medical training had prepared me for the horrifying effects of the combination of blast, heat, and radiation. Nor could I comprehend human suffering on such a massive scale. Seventy-five thousand people were killed instantaneously. Those who survived the immediate blast wandered the city aimlessly, their bodies burned, their skin melted and hanging down in strips.

There were 300 doctors in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. After the bombing, only 50 were able to attend to the victims. The others were either dead or severely injured. Those who remained, and those who came to help, were virtually helpless in the face of such an overwhelming nightmare.

On August 9, 1945, the US dropped another nuclear weapon on Nagasaki. Eventually, some 200,000 people, the majority of whom were innocent citizens, died in the wake of these two nuclear attacks. And the tragedy is not over yet. Today, there are still more than 300,000 survivors who will suffer from devastating delayed radiation effects for the rest of their lives, including leukaemia, genetic malformations, and other horrible after-effects of the most indiscriminate and poisonous of weapons.

For me, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima remains vivid more than 50 years later. But in recent years, it seemed that the memory of these terrible events was largely fading from public consciousness, as many believed their leaders' assurances that the nuclear threat had largely ended.

The events of September 11 have indeed changed many things. But importantly from the perspective of anti-nuclear activists, it jolted millions out of denial and a false sense of security. We all watched in disbelief, horror, and profound sadness as explosions and fireballs from jet planes loaded with fuel took the lives of nearly 3,000 innocent civilians. Yet what we saw was a fraction of the kind of devastation that nuclear weapons cause. The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks made what had become the subject of Tom Clancy thrillers a very real possibility to many again.



And what we have long suspected has been confirmed. Terrorists are trying to go nuclear. If they do, the horrors of September 11 will pale against the death and destruction that will result from just one relatively small nuclear bomb. A recent study by IPPNW's US affiliate, Physicians for Social Responsibility, found that a 12.5-kiloton nuclear weapon—the same size as the one used on Hiroshima—exploded in New York City would kill 52,000 people immediately from the blast and thermal effects. Another 200,000 more would later die from the intense radiation produced by the explosion. Clearly, there could be no meaningful medical response to such a catastrophe.

The Bush Administration wants US citizens and, indeed citizens throughout the world, to believe that it is moving in directions that will make the world safer from the threat of nuclear war. They want people to believe that they are moving beyond the Cold War mindset. Nothing could be further from the truth, and here are some of the reasons why.

The Administration's reckless pursuit of a National Missile Defense (NMD) system is designed to perpetuate the notion that the US can retain its nuclear arsenal forever and protect its people from nuclear attack. Star Wars is now and always has been a high-tech duck-and-cover scheme driven by the military-industrial complex that will increase—not decrease—the risk of nuclear war. And billions of taxpayer dollars are filling corporate coffers while millions throughout the world live in abject poverty and die from preventable diseases.

The Administration claims that the Bush-Putin agreement on strategic nuclear arsenals includes meaningful reductions. It doesn't. Under the plan, an additional 7,800 intact nuclear warheads and components for 5,000 more will remain in storage, ready for re-deployment. With the 1,700-2,200 that will be actively deployed, this makes a total of some 15,000 warheads remaining in the US arsenal. And this agreement does nothing to de-alert the thousands of US and Russian strategic weapons that remain on hair-trigger alert ready to be launched within minutes.

The Bush Administration's recent Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) sets the US and the world on a very dangerous course. It greatly lowers the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and calls for plans to use nuclear weapons in response to an Iraqi attack on Israel or another country and in response to an attack by North Korea on South Korea, to name a few. And for the first time since World War II, the US is targeting non-nuclear nations with nuclear weapons.

It is clear that the NPR is ushering in a second nuclear age. The US is developing the next generation of smaller, more usable nuclear weapons and planning new production facilities to build them. Edward Teller, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb, calls Star Wars the third generation of nuclear weapons.

The US is sending the wrong signals to the rest of the world with its insistence on maintaining its nuclear weapons in perpetuity—in flagrant violation of its Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations. And its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty threatens to unravel the entire existing arms control regime.

I joined IPPNW almost two decades ago with the events of August 1945 very much in my mind. I believed then, and believe now, that IPPNW has made extraordinary contributions to the prevention of nuclear war. Through Nobel Peace Prize-winning public education and advocacy, through diplomacy and rigorous scientific study, IPPNW speaks for sanity and humanity.

My plea to you is this. Mark the 57th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by joining my family and me in making a generous contribution to IPPNW to fund our work to abolish nuclear weapons. Your gift will honor the memory of those whose lives were lost or forever changed in August 1945, and it will signal your commitment to a future free from the threat of nuclear weapons.



Only by banning nuclear weapons can we ensure that our children and grandchildren will never experience the horrific consequences a nuclear weapon can bring. At the A-Bomb Memorial in Hiroshima, there is a plaque that reads: "Rest in peace, for the evil shall not be repeated." This is our collective promise, and we must keep it.

Sincerely, Kenjiro Yokoro, MD