

To the leaders of our nine nuclear armed states,

Many years ago, a hibakusha sincerely asked me to share these words, *“abolish all nuclear weapons and save this beautiful planet for our children, grandchildren and further generations.”*

Nuclear weapons have created an illusion of peace, but I ask that you see them for what they truly are, a threat to our existence. Seventy-nine years have passed since these weapons were used in warfare yet the damage that they caused lingers on. I have seen with my own eyes the legacy that they have left, a legacy of harm, a legacy of silence, and a legacy of guilt. There are no winners.

We have the ability of hindsight to know that nuclear weapons have caused hundreds of thousands of casualties, severe environmental damage, and ruined lives. For years I listened to stories of hibakusha who were caught up in your fighting, your wars.

Who was there when children were left wondering why a plane which glistened so beautifully in the sky forever changed their childhood?

What made you think that you could leave families torn apart by these weapons?

When did you get forcefully silenced from speaking about the horrors that you witnessed?

Where were you as a mother placed her daughter's school blouse, delicately wrapped, at the back of a drawer to never be used again?

How could you leave a parent crying out for their lost child when the wind blows at night?

Why don't you see the damage that goes beyond the physical?

I cannot forget the words which left the lips of innocent civilians, but equally, of the servicemen and servicewomen who tested your weapons. Their voices will not fade with time, we will not forget. The dates, August 6th and 9th, 1945 have, and will, go down in history. In your race to develop the bomb and advance its technology, you created hibakusha of your own, men, women, and children. You placed a burden on those who should never have been intended to carry it. Therefore, I ask that whenever you think about the geopolitical climate, you take a moment to first think of the people.

Nuclear weapons cause unquestionable damage, yet you keep these for 'safety.' You hold the notion of deterrence close, and the 12,000 nuclear weapons in your cumulative arsenal closer. If a single nuclear weapon were used today, it would have catastrophic implications. The increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape and risks associated with nuclear weapons have never been greater. I watch, from the other side of our planet, as threats are made against Ukraine and Gaza. Have we not learned from the past?

We are the closest we have ever been to midnight and what that unprecedented danger holds. I do not wish to live in a world where our cries are dried out by the fires that will ravage our cities, where our voices make no sound drowned out by the 'boom' of a bomb. Your reliance on nuclear weaponry increases the risk of nuclear escalation- a cycle we cannot escape unless you take the necessary steps to disarm.

I do not write to ask one of you to make a change, I write to ask it of you all; what if this 'umbrella' you hold so close is the very thing preventing peace. Instead of threatening to use these for the guise of your own safety, let go of the illusion and see nuclear weapons for what they truly are, a threat to our future.

You have the power to create change. The financial costs of maintaining and modernising nuclear arsenals are staggering; in 2021, together you spent more than 82.4 billion dollars on nuclear weapons. This figure is the equivalent of 156 thousand dollars per minute, so not only is disarmament the right thing to do, but it is also the financially smart thing to do. Redirecting these funds would enable you to focus on the future, protect resources, and support humanitarian affairs. The pursuit of a nuclear-free world is not only a matter of strategic interest but also of moral and economic necessity.

As leaders of the nine nuclear armed states, I implore you to see that disarmament is a sign of strength and foresight. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) highlight a need to prevent the spread of these weapons and promote disarmament. Your commitment to these Treaties could foster more stable international relations and reduce the potential for conflicts.

I appeal to your empathy and sense of responsibility towards future generations; our safety lies in your hands. Listen to the people, take heed from the past, and know that these weapons have no place in our future.

*Sincerely,
Olivia Shimasaki*