

Report of the 69th anniversary of the dropping of the first nuclear bombs

World Conference against A and H Bombs, Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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5th August, 2014, afternoon, Hiroshima in the rain. The city prepares for the commemoration of the victims: the Peace Park is ready for the great ceremony, the schools are festively decorated and the temples are preparing for the different services. A couple of minutes of silence in memory of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the first nuclear bomb during a wet but impressive event. But also, we hear more precise words than in the past, among others during the short speech of the conservative Mayor of Hiroshima, Mr Kazumi Matsui.

Also, more precise words addressed to the nuclear weapons states in the greeting offered by the UN Secretary-General. They illustrate the growing impatience of the majority of the international community with the lack of progress towards a world without nuclear weapons. The speech of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is difficult to accept, since his actions are making his words appear quite cynical.

But the importance of the event is shown by the long list of international guests, for example Angela Kane (UN High Representative for Disarmament) and Alexander Kmentt (Austrian Ambassador to the UN).



Impressions of the international conference:

It is very similar to the conferences of the previous years, and yet some changes can be felt almost physically -- and they were expressly stated by the speakers from all over the world at the International Conference Against A & H Bombs: highlighting the dangers arising from the current worldwide confrontations. These certainly include the “new” Japanese intervention policy, which strongly reminds us of the belligerent German foreign policy in the early 1990s. A

policy defended with lies and the verbal downplaying of increased militarization – which will have to be enforced against the stubborn resistance of the population. The public are almost desperately clinging to the “pacifist Article 9” of the Constitution.

Confrontation is the keyword, which expresses the intensified international situation. Among Japanese peace activists this is related to the situation in East Asia: the mutual provocations between China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam as well as the encirclement policy of the United States, which drive the region with increasing frequency to the brink of war. And then there are the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, which pose a serious threat to world peace.

It is very moving to see the tremendous efforts of the Japanese peace movement (at the main Hiroshima event there were nearly 7000 participants) to promote the abolition of all nuclear weapons, a demand repeated over and over again, with strong popular support. Successes were mentioned frequently, like the new permanent UN Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons; the 2018 world conference proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement; the inter-governmental conferences on the “humanitarian consequences” of nuclear weapons; the resolutions of the UN General Assembly; the worldwide isolation of the nuclear powers. Negative developments, especially the modernization of nuclear weapons and the inaction on nuclear disarmament by all 9 nuclear possessors, are perceived but not in their full scope. After all, scrapping of old nuclear weapons is not sufficient. There are high hopes for the NPT Review Conference in 2015. Two thousand activists plan to travel to New York with 15 million signatures, in order to take part in the protests (counter-summit and demonstrations) and to exert pressure on the delegations.

New at the Hiroshima Peace Conference was the almost total absence of the Hibakusha (victims of nuclear bombing) of the first generation. This is all the more dramatic because of the reports of the large number of early deaths, among others because of cancer or deformities, among the Hibakusha of the 2nd and 3rd generations (children or grandchildren).

Furthermore, in Japan there is now a clear position against atomic energy. The consequences of Fukushima are not yet fully discernible -- the catastrophe is worse than Chernobyl. What is discernible is that young people are also joining the movement against nuclear weapons, which is a grass-roots movement – creative, manifold, persistent and socially responsible. We can learn a lot from this movement.

What remains? Not only the ruin of the Industrial Promotion Hall (see photo) and of course the enormous friendship of the Japanese, but also the necessity to build the movement against nuclear weapons and to keep the total abolition of nuclear weapons on the agenda, not least in Germany.

Finally I must say thank you once again to our hosts Gensuikyo for an impressive conference and also for the events held after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemoration days. IPB is lucky to have such a friendship with the Japanese peace movement. We will meet again in early December at the inter-governmental conference on the “humanitarian consequences” of nuclear weapons in Vienna and in 2015 at the NPT Review Conference in New York.

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