

Special Lecture: Building a World Without Nuclear Weapons

Feedback from the Participants

<From High School Students>

1. Learn the importance of “knowing”

Upon listening to Mr. Hiromi Tanaka’s story, I was deeply moved in a way I had never experienced before. Receiving words directly from someone who had actually lived through the war fundamentally shook my very concept of “war.”

When I was in elementary school, I read a book called *Riding the Crane* and learned that atomic bomb survivors did not simply die on the spot, but later fell ill due to the effects of radiation. However, to me at the time, it felt like something happening in a distant world, and I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was simply reading a “story.” Listening to Mr. Tanaka’s vivid testimony this time, I was once again confronted with the reality that what was written in that book was by no means fiction, but a hellish reality experienced by fellow human beings right here in Japan.

Through school lessons and TV documentaries, I had always thought I understood the atomic bombings and war. However, I was shocked to realize that, deep down, I had somehow come to view them as “made-up stories” that had nothing to do with me. Having grown accustomed to my peaceful daily life, I had been unable to face the horrific events that once took place in Japan. Yet even now, wars are still being waged around the world, and innocent people are suffering. War is by no means a relic of the past; it is a cruel reality that continues to unfold today.

What saddens and angers me most is that there are still countries that possess nuclear weapons and are willing to use them as a “last resort.”

It is not something a human being should do to justify a weapon that takes countless lives in an instant and inflicts lifelong suffering on those who survive.

Building a peaceful world may be an incredibly difficult challenge. To be honest, I still don’t know what I, as a single student, can do. However, I want to start by never forgetting the reality of the atomic bombings that I learned about this time—and the shock and pain I felt—and by continuing to wholeheartedly hope for a world without nuclear weapons.

(Sachiho Kamata: Resides in Ichinoseki City; originally from Ryori, Ofunato City)

<From the Areas Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake>

2. Reflecting as Global Citizens

Listening directly to Professor Tanaka’s personal account of his wartime experiences

and his firsthand account of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki during this lecture was an experience so valuable that words cannot fully express it. The weight of reality—which cannot be fully conveyed through documents or video footage—came across powerfully in every single word he spoke, leaving me with a heavy, constricting feeling in my chest. At the same time, this experience etched the conviction that we must never repeat the same mistakes again even more deeply into my heart than ever before.

His lecture prompted me to once again reflect deeply on the meaning of the “Three Non-Nuclear Principles.” Nuclear weapons are not something humans should ever handle; once used, they can take everything away. Precisely because Japan knows the horror of nuclear weapons, I strongly feel that we must continue to call on the world to abolish them.

Furthermore, I had serious concerns about nuclear power. As Professor Tanaka pointed out, nuclear power is a human creation, and no matter how much technology advances, we cannot say with absolute certainty that it is “absolutely safe.” The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake clearly demonstrated this vulnerability. Nevertheless, I feel uneasy and anxious about the current situation, in which we continue to rely on nuclear power. I felt that we need to seriously reevaluate whether Japan’s current energy policy is truly the right approach.

Why does Japan—the only country to have suffered atomic bombings in war—continue to employ nuclear power? Shouldn’t we give this contradiction more serious consideration and speak out against it? As I reflected on the significance of *Nihon Hidankyo’s* 70-year history of conveying the true nature of the atomic bombings, I felt a strong sense of responsibility to pass on their message to the next generation.

Finally, the words of Professor Hiromi Tanaka left a deep impression on me.

“We must never allow nuclear weapons to be used. Unless all citizens of the world join forces to eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth as soon as possible, we will face a grave crisis.”

I am determined never to forget these words or the 70-year journey that has led us here, and I am deeply committed to seriously considering what I can do and taking action to help realize a world without nuclear weapons.

(Sihoko Kamata: Resides in Ichinoseki City; originally from Ryori, Ofunato City)

3. Truly Profound

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for having been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I listened to the lecture at I-Room. Sharing the same space, every single word spoken by Professor Tanaka resonated deeply within me.

His Experience of the Atomic Bombing at Age 13

Atomic bomb → Flash → Radiation → Blast wave → Fires → Black smoke

“A nuclear weapon that kills hundreds of thousands of people is not a weapon—it is a tool.”

“Let us become citizens willing to speak out,” and so on

As the performance was drawing to a close in the blink of an eye, I, a citizen from Kamaishi, took the floor.

“Even though we experienced the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant 15 years ago, we’ve been shocked by recent news about the restart of nuclear power plants,” I said. “I’d like to ask Professor Tanaka for his thoughts on this...”

The professor's response—speaking as an engineering expert—was, “Since people are bound to make mistakes...”

“Let’s oppose it...” he said.

That really made sense to me.

While taking away the lives of the people of Fukushima and unable to even dispose of nuclear waste properly, this news of the restart—in the face of such a reality—leaves me feeling powerless and terrified; all I can do is earnestly hope for the invention of new energy sources to replace nuclear power.

That was me, on the way home in the car.

(Hiroko Kitamura: Resident in Kamaishi City)

<From Citizens>

4. Reflections on the Atomic Bombing and Its Aftermath

Listening to the lecture by Mr. Terumi Tanaka of Nihon Hidankyo was a truly valuable experience for me. Nihon Hidankyo is an organization formed primarily by atomic bomb survivors. Through reading books, I learned for the first time that the organization is engaged in various activities, such as advocating for the enactment of the “Atomic Bomb Medical Care Act” for survivors and organizing signature campaigns to promote the adoption and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations. I hope that more people will come to understand that the organization is carrying out a wide range of activities toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, not only in Japan but on a global scale.

When I was a student, I learned about the horror and tragedy of the atomic bombings in class, but I must admit that this was the first time I had ever heard a firsthand

account directly from Professor Tanaka, a survivor of the bombing. Also, when I was in college, I had the opportunity to read a book about the Daigo Fukuryu Maru, which taught me that the effects of nuclear weapons are not limited to wartime but can have a terrifying impact on people's daily lives as well. I once heard in a college lecture that the only way to truly understand war is to listen to the stories of those who lived through it at the time. I sensed that for Mr. Tanaka, not only did he himself suffer the effects of the atomic bombing during the war, but losing five relatives—including his aunts—in such a short period of time must have been a suffering beyond words.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the first places in human history where atomic bombs were dropped, resulting in numerous casualties; however, I believe what is truly terrifying is not only their destructive power but also the subsequent effects of radiation on the human body. During the war, the United States conducted numerous nuclear tests, and young American soldiers were assigned to carry out these experiments without being informed of the risks of radiation exposure. After the war, Japan was placed under the control of the General Headquarters (GHQ), and the fact that the U.S. and the Japanese government concealed reports regarding the atomic bombs for some time afterward feels like they abandoned the state's obligation to provide relief to the atomic bomb survivors and medical professionals involved. It feels as though the government is shirking its duty to provide relief. This, too, seems to reveal a government that prioritizes policy above all else. Furthermore, following the Great East Japan Earthquake, the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant led to the widespread dispersal of radioactive materials, which became a significant problem. During the Q&A session, Professor Tanaka stated that operating nuclear power plants remains difficult with current technology; perhaps coexistence between humanity and nuclear power is still a challenge.

Throughout the world, conflicts and wars between nations are ever-present, and news reports on television and the internet are full of stories about war and conflict. I felt it was our responsibility to pass on the message of nuclear abolition and the tragedies of war to future generations.

(Emiko Kuniyara: Resident of Aichi Prefecture)

5. With Our Senses

I was deeply moved by Mr. Tanaka's request that we understand his experiences through our senses. We hear about the bombings in Iran and the Gaza Strip on the news and have surely seen footage of them, but I think it's extremely difficult to truly grasp them with our senses. If we could share that sense of reality, I believe no one would ever press the nuclear button or pull the trigger of a gun, nor would we neglect

safety in our pursuit of economic growth. However, I think it's a profound question: how can we convey that message and help others feel it when we ourselves are not in that situation? I believe that, as citizens, we are in a position to at least join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and speak out loudly about this issue. I felt that I wanted to use my imagination to convey the pain caused by nuclear weapons—both to myself and to future generations.

(Rie Ariga: Resident of Tokyo)

6. Standing at a Crossroads

With tensions in the Middle East currently at an all-time high, I believe we have reached a critical crossroads regarding how Japan can prevent itself from being drawn into the ravages of war. I hear that, unlike conventional weapons of the past, extremely brutal specialized weapons are being used. Of course, I believe that the risk of nuclear weapons being used cannot be ruled out. I wholeheartedly resonated with Mr. Hiromi Tanaka's stance—who, unlike many politicians, shows no deference to the logic of major powers that pursue their own economic prosperity even at the cost of human lives, and instead resolutely voices criticism from the perspective of disaster victims.

(Kazuko Narai: Resident of Tokyo)

<Excerpt from the survey>

7. Words of Great Significance

“Nuclear weapons are not weapons. They are the devil's tools. Even if you survive, your humanity is no longer the same.”

→ These were words of great significance spoken by someone who had witnessed the horrors of the atomic bombing firsthand.

“Passing on these stories means truly understanding war and having discussions about it.”

→ I was struck by the phrase, “discussing things.” I realized that pooling our strengths to think together and sharing ideas to take action are the fundamentals of solving problems.

(Mr. A: Resident in Iwate Prefecture)

8. Deeply drawn in by his vivid and powerful lecture, he had me leaning forward in my seat as I listened. Through his experiences during the atomic bombings, I was profoundly shocked to learn that the damage caused by nuclear weapons is not limited to the destruction resulting from the explosion itself, but also includes the loss of life

that occurs later due to radiation. I felt that the reality of people who were thought to have survived but later died, and the history of how even the lives of those who evacuated for safety were cruelly taken, symbolize the fundamental inhumanity of nuclear weapons.

(Ms. B: Resident of Tokyo)

9. I was deeply moved by your thoughtful account of your personal experience of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki.

From the current state of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), nuclear deterrence theory, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, this gave me an opportunity to once again reflect on “human beings,” “society,” and “groups,” and consider how we can move from “trust” to “dialogue” to “nuclear abolition.”

...The NPT can be described as a system of “structural violence” maintained by nuclear-weapon states with the approval and consent of the treaty’s signatories, based on the premise of the absolute non-use of nuclear weapons on Earth; the current attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel are also premised on the maintenance of this system. The possession of nuclear weapons by Israel and others demonstrates the limitations of the current security framework under international law.

(Mr. C: Resident in Iwate Prefecture)

*Afterward, the respondent commented, “Based on Johan Galtung’s definition, the description of ‘structural violence’ seems to deviate slightly,” suggesting that further scrutiny is needed.

10. Nuclear Bombs Will Destroy the World

This raised a profound question for each and every one of us: “How can we build a peaceful, nuclear-free world?” To address this challenge, I felt it was most important to look back on the history of the past 80 years since the end of the war—and indeed, the 100 years since the beginning of the Shōwa era—and to continue learning from it. Sharing the thoughts and hopes we gain from this process, and each of us taking our own small steps forward, is exactly what is needed right now. Even if we are not politicians, each of us has an important role to play in continuing to reflect on how to protect our own lives and the lives of others, and how to build a peaceful world, all while carrying on with our research and activities. I firmly believe it is entirely possible to share the lessons and insights we gain through our learning with society.

I hope we can continue to learn together moving forward. I believe this is one of the key roles of the Disaster Culture Research Society.

(Mr. D: Resident in Iwate Prefecture)

11. I was amazed to learn that Professor Terumi Tanaka, who traveled all the way to Morioka to give this lecture, is 93 years old! He spoke seamlessly, and I could tell that the events of 81 years ago are still vividly etched in his mind and heart. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for his calm and composed account of those events, despite having witnessed such devastation firsthand. I felt truly fortunate to have had this opportunity to glimpse a part of the principled life of someone who considers the abolition of nuclear weapons his “mission.” I believe this experience will undoubtedly enrich the rest of my life, and I am determined to put it to good use.

On the other hand, I think there were some things Professor Tanaka didn’t mention. I felt I had to use my own imagination and do some research on my own. Professor Tanaka said that while he was horrified by the terrible condition of the atomic bomb survivors, after seeing five or six of them, he stopped feeling that way. I think it was a scene of devastation that went beyond what any human could endure. He mentioned that, strangely enough, Nagasaki—home to the shipyard where battleships were being built—had not been heavily bombed. He speculated that the reason might have been to observe the effects of the atomic bomb.

Looking at the hostilities currently taking place around the world, war seems to be nothing more than an experiment in testing advanced weapons in populated areas. Civilians are treated as guinea pigs, and those in power regard a single human life with far too little regard—a trend that, far from having changed since 81 years ago, may in fact be growing even stronger. Precisely because we live in an era where economic and political systems are said to be becoming increasingly globalized and complex, I want to take Professor Tanaka’s guiding principle of “keep it simple” to heart. It was a lecture that left me determined to act with the simple principles of “not waging war” and “protecting life” firmly in mind.

Tanaka Sensei, thank you very much!

(Ms. E, Tokyo resident)