



24 June 2020

The Right Honourable Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Dear Prime Minister Johnson:

This August will mark 75 years since the United States, in collaboration with the British government, dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than a quarter of a million people. 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.

We atomic bomb survivors are greatly disturbed by the continued modernization of nuclear weapons by the United Kingdom and other nuclear-armed nations, and your stated willingness to use these instruments of genocide. We are also alarmed by the UK government's insistence on replacing Trident, especially given the near unanimous support for their removal from Faslane by Scottish citizens. Even in this unprecedented time of crisis, nuclear-armed countries, such as yours, continue to hold the world hostage under the threat of nuclear annihilation while squandering billions of pounds on nuclear arsenals instead of meeting human needs.

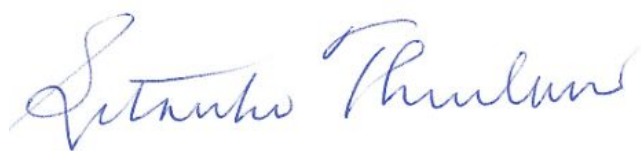
As someone who actually witnessed and experienced the consequences of nuclear war, I have brutal images in my mind almost all the time, of dead and dying people, crying out for water. For 75 years, atomic bomb survivors have been speaking out against nuclear deterrence policies. The idea that strategic stability or military dominance could be achieved by detonating a nuclear bomb, irreversibly contaminating our environment and leveraging the instantaneous death of millions of human beings, is intolerable and unacceptable.

Nuclear weapons are not a necessary evil, they are the ultimate evil. It is unacceptable for any state to possess them. Every second of every day, nuclear weapons endanger everyone we love and everything we hold dear.

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 COVID-19 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.

On behalf of 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, I urge you to take action to become a state party without delay.

Sincerely yours,



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