

Only Human Beings Can Save Humanity from This Crisis: Confronting Developments That Threaten Decades of Hibakusha Advocacy

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What issues will be discussed at the NPT Review Conference, which opens on April 27? In light of the fact that the previous two Review Conferences failed to produce a final document, concerns have been raised that if this conference ends without a final document, the significance of the NPT itself may be undermined. This treaty, which entered into force in 1970, has long been described as an unequal treaty because it recognizes only five countries—the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China—as Nuclear-Weapon States. For this very reason, Nihon Hidankyo did not send representatives to NPT Review Conferences until 2000. As stipulated in the Treaty, a vote was held at the 1995 Review Conference, 25 years after its entry into force, to determine the duration of the Treaty. As a result, the Treaty was extended indefinitely. The 2000 Review Conference therefore marked the beginning of a new phase in the review process. What issues were discussed at the review conferences held every five years before then? The main issues were the Treaty's unequal nature and whether to extend the Treaty beyond its initial 25-year term. At the 2000 Review Conference, which produced a final document, agreement was reached on 13 practical steps, including a commitment that reads: "An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed under Article VI."

More than 80 years have passed since the atomic bombings, and this year marks the 70th anniversary of Nihon Hidankyo. Yet we must still ask: Have the voices and aspirations of hibakusha truly reached people around the world?

On August 5, 2024, I heard remarks by Izumi Nakamitsu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at the annual exchange of views with members of all political parties in the National Diet, organized by the Japan Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. She expressed grave concern that an increasing number of states were now speaking about the possible use of nuclear weapons even at meetings of the NPT Preparatory Committee—something unprecedented in the past—and warned that the threshold for nuclear use was becoming lower.

Now, two years later, in 2026, that sense of crisis may be turning into an even more serious reality. This is largely due to a series of developments that have taken place since the beginning of this year.

In January, the sitting President of Venezuela was abducted, detained, and transferred to the United States in a military operation ordered by President Trump. Even though there was no direct mention of the use of nuclear weapons, it reflected the coercive power associated with nuclear-weapon possession.

On February 5, 2026, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the last remaining nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia, expired. The United States had called for a new framework that would include China, while Russia favored extending the treaty [1]. However, the two sides failed to reach an agreement, and the treaty expired. Before its expiration, President Trump stated, “If it expires, it expires. We’ll just do a better agreement.” What did President Trump mean by a “better agreement”? It may be an agreement that serves the interests of the United States alone—or perhaps merely President Trump’s own interests.

Then, on February 28, the United States and Israel suddenly launched attacks on Iran under the pretext of preventing Iran from advancing its nuclear and missile programs. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader, was killed, and Iran began retaliatory attacks, leading to an ongoing crisis that continues to this day, with the Strait of Hormuz remaining closed.

Over the past three months, a succession of alarming developments has shaken the world. We are living under a growing cloud of fear and uncertainty. A sense of crisis now hangs over the world. We must not lose sight of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is receiving less media attention than before, nor the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Gaza Strip as a result of the prolonged fighting.

At the end of March, I had the opportunity to join a 10-day Peace Boat voyage. The voyage departed from Kobe, Japan, at the end of last December and lasted 108 days around the globe. I joined the voyage only for its final leg, sailing from Singapore via Taiwan to Yokohama, Japan, for ten days. Among those who had been away from Japan for three months, I heard people wonder whether Japan might be a different country by the time they returned home. Never before on a Peace Boat voyage had there been such a strong feeling that the world—and Japan itself—might change so dramatically. In keeping with the spirit of Peace Boat, a wide variety of events and lectures were held on board, providing many learning opportunities. I met people

who were determined to put what they had learned into practice upon returning home and to build on the activities in which they were already engaged. During the voyage, I was grateful to have had many opportunities to exchange ideas with people whom I would probably never have met otherwise.

Peace Boat was founded in 1983 as a voyage for “peace education,” through which participants visited places in Asia, learned about history firsthand, and engaged in dialogue with local people. It has since grown into a large-scale cruise operation, and people now join its voyages for a variety of reasons. Many passengers simply enjoy it as a cruise vacation.

The concerns voiced by my fellow passengers were also focused on Japan’s current administration as we sailing through the troubled water. There were fears that the Three Non-Nuclear Principles [2] might be revised and that Japan’s pacifist Constitution might be amended. (In fact, the Japanese Cabinet has already approved the abolition of the so-called “Five Categories” of defense equipment transfers [3], paving the way for the export of weapons with lethal capabilities.)

Japan is now being transformed into a country capable of waging war. Today, 81 years after the atomic bombings and 70 years after the founding of Nihon Hidankyo, we are facing a situation in which the long-standing call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, the hopes of the hibakusha, and the entire history of our movement—consistently upheld over all these years—appear to be in danger of being rendered meaningless. The tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be repeated. This is the heartfelt wish of the hibakusha.

At the 2022 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I delivered a statement as a member of an NGO. “The Nuclear-Weapon States and their allies should recognize that, because of their insincerity and arrogance, humanity as a whole is on the brink of nuclear war.” Then I called upon the representatives of all countries: “I urge you to seriously discuss the implementation of the ‘unequivocal undertaking’ for the elimination of nuclear weapons reaffirmed at the 2010 Review Conference.” And in closing, I cried out, “No More Hibakusha!”

That conviction remains unchanged today. At the Review Conference, we will also call for the implementation of the NPT, whose 191 States Parties include all five Nuclear-Weapon States and represent the vast majority of UN member states. As the only country to have suffered atomic bombings in war, and one where hibakusha still live today, the Japanese government should have a unique message to convey to the world. Japan has earned the trust of many

nations through its commitment to a Constitution that renounces war. We strongly urge the Japanese government to recognize once again that Article 9 of the Constitution [4] was born out of reflection on Japan's wartime aggression and on the devastation wrought by war, including the atomic bombings. For only we, as human beings, can deliver humanity from its dire hour of crisis.

Notes

[1] Strictly speaking, Russia did not propose a formal extension of New START. Instead, it proposed that both sides continue to observe the treaty's numerical limits on strategic nuclear forces for one year after its expiration.

[2] The Three Non-Nuclear Principles are Japan's policy of not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan.

[3] The "Five Categories" restrictions limited Japan's exports of defense equipment to five specific cases: rescue, transport, vigilance, surveillance, and minesweeping activities.

[4] Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution renounces war and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes, and declares that Japan will not maintain war potential.

About the Author



Masako Wada was born in 1943 in Nagasaki, Japan. She serves as Assistant Secretary-General of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo). She was 1 year and 10 months old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. After graduating from Kwassui Women's Junior College and Meiji Gakuin University, she worked as an English teacher. From 1977, she spent about five years living in the United States. Since 2015, she has served as an officer of Nihon Hidankyo and has continued to share her experiences as an atomic bomb survivor both in Japan and abroad. When Nihon Hidankyo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024, she welcomed the global recognition of atomic bomb survivors and their experiences. Since the same year, she has also served as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the Japan Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. She continues to be a leading advocate for a world free of nuclear weapons.