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Statement to the Open Ended Working Group
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71 years ago, as a 13-year old child I survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. With a single blinding flash of light, the Hiroshima I remembered as my home, school and neighbourhood vanished from the face of the earth and turned to hell on earth. A bright summer morning turned into dark twilight, with smoke and dust rising in a mushroom cloud. Dead and injured people were covering the ground. Some were made naked by the blast. They were bleeding, burned, blackened and swollen; unrecognizable as human beings. Parts of their bodies were missing, flesh and skin hanging from their bones, some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands, some with their stomachs burst open, with their intestines hanging out. Still to this day I can vividly remember this gruesome procession of ghostly figures.

Miraculously, I was rescued from the rubble of a collapsed building, which was about 1.8 km from ground zero, but most of my classmates in the same room were burned alive. In the centre of the city, just below the detonation, several thousand grade seven and grade eight students from all of the city's high schools were engaged in the task of clearing fire lanes. These young girls and boys were simply melted, vaporized and carbonized with the heat of 4000 degrees Celsius.

Of a population of roughly 360,000 people – largely non-combatant women, children and elderly – most became victims of the indiscriminate massacre of one atomic bomb. The effects of the radiation are still killing survivors to this day. Having lived through such an unprecedented catastrophe, we survivors became convinced of our mission of warning the world about the utterly unacceptable reality of these inhumane nuclear weapons. Thus, we have been calling for the total abolition of such devices of mass murder for the past seven decades. Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as victims of nuclear weapon testing, are dying away with the hope of “abolition in our lifetime” unfulfilled. For us, the past 70 years seemed like a never-ending struggle to advocate for nuclear disarmament. But, we have never lost our conviction that only by eliminating nuclear weapons will human survival be possible.
And now, the birth of the Humanitarian Initiative is like opening the door of hope for a new chapter of our struggle, and, for the world community, it has galvanized peoples’ energy and commitment. The Humanitarian Initiative has reframed how we think and talk about nuclear weapons and refocused our attention from the military doctrine of deterrence to the real impact of nuclear weapons, on all living beings and our environment. We pray that this Open Ended Working Group progresses productively so that it could set the stage for negotiations on a new legally binding instrument that prohibits nuclear weapons.

Outside this conference room is a visual example of a humanitarian impact I know too well. It is a list of my schoolmates who perished in the bombing. You will see four or five characters that make up the name of a person, and there are 351 of them here from my own school. Young lively girls, laughing and chattering until the moment of 8:15 AM on August 6 1945. Each one has a name and was loved by someone. They are 351 of several thousand who were melted, vaporized or carbonized. I find this banner useful to help people think of the victims not simply as numbers but as real human beings.

As Dr. Lewis said on Monday, it is difficult to understand the probability of nuclear weapons use by accident or design, but we know that the probability is not zero. Understanding the consequences is not difficult – especially for us survivors. But even for those who survived, it is still unimaginable because of the exponential scale of the horror produced by modern nuclear weapons.

Also on Monday, I was profoundly disturbed as a hibakusha that the Japanese government continues to defend and justify its nuclear umbrella. Domestically our political leaders all repeat the same sentiment. They say “as the only nation to have suffered nuclear bombs, we must be at the forefront in taking action for disarmament”.

And yet the Japanese Government and other nuclear alliance states are being obstructionist in these proceedings. While the city of Hiroshima has a special meaning as a symbol, for example, the recent G7 Foreign Ministers visit and declaration, has not resulted in concrete steps to address the plea of the hibakusha for nuclear disarmament. Not just hibakusha but the majority of the Japanese public fervently desire nuclear abolition. Our sense of abandonment is real.
We hibakusha were moved by President Obama’s statement in Prague when he said “as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon the United States has a moral responsibility to act”. Now we hibakusha are waiting to hear if Mr. Obama will be the first US president to visit Hiroshima at the end of this month. Yet, the US cannot even send a representative to this meeting. Where is the moral responsibility or leadership in that?

We should all be working together to find a way to make disarmament a reality. And the most expedient way, according to the majority of the nations represented here, 127 that have endorsed the humanitarian pledge, is to move forward to a ban on nuclear weapons.

Thank you.