

“in the presence of all who perished”

Voices of witnesses and survivors

“All of a sudden, a strange yellow light pierced through my eyes. At the same time, I heard my hair burning behind my head. I thought it was a flare bomb. So I covered my eyes, nose, and ears with my both hands and kept lying low on the ground. That is why I didn’t hear the explosion of the atomic bomb. I was very scared. Time passed while I was lying down trembling. Finally, I lifted my head cautiously. It was supposed to be a bright summer morning, but it was pitch black.

“There was absolutely nothing left in Japan after the war, and it was a cruel period. We survived by sharing the little that we had. Japan managed to recover and now we live in peace. Yet we face a lot of challenges. You may remember the Fukushima nuclear accidents from years ago. That was a disaster brought upon by nuclear power. This terrifying nuclear power cannot coexist with this planet or us humans. Today, people around the world are taking action to abolish nuclear weapons and stop nuclear power plants immediately. I will keep on fighting with people around the world to restore this beautiful planet Earth.”

~ Jongkeun Lee

“I have a list of 279 people from the Tularosa area that Henry and I know or knew that have had cancer, died of cancer, or are cancer survivors.

“The atomic bomb has caused anguish to so many people in New Mexico.

“I say we are sufferers of radiation exposure and our government should apologize to us for being abandoned to our fate.”

~ Gloria Herrera

“I have lost my mom and three of her siblings to cancer. I have five first cousins battling cancer at this time. My son was treated for a brain tumor, and my baby sister, only 46 years old, was diagnosed with cancer. And this doesn’t count all the friends, people I have known all my life here in Tularosa and Alamogordo.

“Is any of this fair??? The pain, the suffering I had to live, to see my loved ones go through? And my story is only one of hundreds here in the Tularosa Basin.

“That fateful day of the Bomb has been a terrible injustice to all of us. All we are asking is that our government face up to the wrong that has been done.

“The Bomb created nothing but suffering and death for us. The scary thing is we all wait to hear who gets the next diagnosis.”

~ Rosemary Cordova

“The nine countries with nuclear weapons contaminate our earth and kill people on account of nuclear testing and accidents every year.

“For what did these innocent people need to die? For the victory of the war, for the satisfactions of people in power, or for personal wealth?

“We can’t change our horrible past, but our future is on our hands. Even though we can’t bring back the 400,000 A-bomb victims to life, even though we can’t cure the pains and agonies that they went through, we can stop this mass destruction from happening again.

“We all deserve peace in our lives. Learning from our history, it is obvious that wars and nuclear weapons will never give us peace, but love and compassion will. We should forget which country we belong to or which country we were born. We all are residents of the Earth.”

~ Miyako Taguchi

“On August 6th, 1945, it was a beautiful morning. At 8:15 am, after my father and my sister already left for work, one nuclear-bomb was dropped on us, and instantly, thousands of people were incinerated and the rest were seriously burnt and injured. The city turned into a hell.”

~ Hiroshi Iso

“Until recently I never talked about my dire experience of the atomic bomb even to my own children. One of the reasons is because I always wanted to forget about it and wanted to live cheerfully with positive spirit. The other reason is I hated to make people sad when I talk about my experience. But I realized I can never get away from it

“I now talk about my experiences in public. What do you think changed me? One of the reasons is that I do not want any of our children and future generations to experience what I have been through.

“I started to feel a responsibility to get into action as a *hibakusha*; Action to make the world peaceful without fear of dropping bombs, and action to keep the sky above our children and young people always blue and beautiful. I have many wonderful friends here in the US. I wish the sky above them would be beautiful and nuclear free as well. I wish that we will be the last survivors of nuclear weapons. If this wish is shared with people all over the world, I believe that some day we can accomplish a nuclear free world.

“I think it is important to start to love your family first, then stretch those chains of love to your friends and neighbors. It is my utmost pleasure if you agree with me and start creating your own chains of love and peace.”

~ Toshiko Tanaka

MEMORY
The Soldier

Whatever I saw
wiped out
everything around it.
but whatever grabbed
my attention
was too much to be
looked at
so that each horror
deleted all others
and itself
like the wind
that shrouded itself and the earth in a veil
of dust
but afterward
walking that road in my mind's eye
I saw our house gone
into splinters
our great porcelain wine jar
into shards
all the comforting parts of my life
turned into missiles
that could no longer blind me—
and I looked into the wind's barrage
awakened now
at any hour of the day
and rushed back onto the road to Kabe
fleeing Hiroshima
these are the things I am always leaving
behind—
a burning pine tree
fallen power lines
a field of smashed watermelons
a dead horse
a piece of wood stuck
in a woman's eye
naked girls
covering their breasts, and crying
"Stupid America!"
my brother Kyuzo
whose body I carried to the river
who lay in great anguish the whole night
he couldn't die
the hands of a baby
black arms lifted to the sky
her fingers on fire
burning with ten blue flames

"My dad and mom Jess and Louise Gilliland, my dad's brother Pete and his wife Wilma walked around at the Trinity site after the bomb was detonated. They picked up the melted sand and took it home, not knowing it was full of radiation.

"Back in those days they had a fence around the Trinity site, but the gate was open. Judy and I were in our mom's ovaries at the time. Judy and I both got cancer. Wilma was pregnant at the time with Shirley Ann. Shirley was born without any eyes.

"Alice Smith's daughter Viola told her doctor she hadn't been born yet when the bomb went off, so she doesn't have to worry about cancer. He told her the radiation altered our DNA so we are more susceptible to cancer.

"Genevra's brother John Wood lived on the ranch to the south of her. He died of leukemia. His son Howard and his daughter Bonnie both died of cancer. Genevra's brother Pete's ranch was to the south of John's. Pete's son-in-law Harvey Hinkle has liposarcoma cancer, his son Eldon died a few months ago from esophageal cancer.

"These are just the cancer victims who are my family. My oldest daughter Jackie says it's not a matter of if you get cancer; it's a matter of when."

~ Edna Kay Hinkle

"We remember the atomic weapons testing and the uranium mines in Western Australia and we have brothers and sisters who live next to the uranium mines in South Australia and the Northern Territory. We know that this industry does not give our people jobs and money but instead leads to sickness, divided communities, and contaminated land."

~ Kado Muir, Ngalia elder

"Dear young people who have never experienced war,

'Wars begin covertly. If you sense it coming, it may be too late.'

"Within the Japanese Constitution you will find Article 9, the international peace clause. For the past 72 years, we have not maimed or been maimed by a single human being in the context of war. We have flourished as a peaceful nation.

"Japan is the only nation that has experienced a nuclear attack. We must assert, with far more urgency, that nuclear weapons cannot coexist with humankind.

"The current administration is slowly leading our nation to war, I'm afraid. At the ripe age of 78, I have taken it upon myself to speak out against nuclear proliferation. Now is not the time to stand idly by.

"Average citizens are the primary victims of war, always. Dear young people who have never experienced the horrors of war – I fear that some of you may be taking this hard-earned peace for granted.

"I pray for world peace. Furthermore, I pray that not a single Japanese citizen falls victim to the clutches of war, ever again. I pray, with all of my heart.

~ Takato Michishita

"I was 11 years old when the bomb was dropped, 2km from where I lived. In recent years, I have been diagnosed with stomach cancer, and have undergone surgery in 2008 and 2010. The atomic bomb has also implicated our children and grandchildren.

"Nuclear weapons should, under no circumstances, be used against humans. However, nuclear powers such as the US and Russia own stockpiles of well over 15,000 nuclear weapons. Not only that, technological advances have given way to a new kind of bomb that can deliver a blast over 1,000 times that of Hiroshima.

"Weapons of this capacity must be abolished from the earth. In our current political climate we struggle to come to a consensus and have yet to implement a ban on nuclear weapons. Nuclear powers are boycotting the agreement.

"I have resigned myself to the fact that nuclear weapons will not be abolished during the lifetime of us first generation *hibakusha*. I pray that younger generations will come together to work toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

~ Yoshiro Yamawaki

"I have served the global community as a nuclear witness urging the fulfillment of justice because I know, with my own experience, the devastating impacts of nuclear weapons and why the world must work meaningfully towards their elimination.

"I might be branded by some as a radical for my conviction against the use, testing or possession of nuclear weapons. But this is not radical. It is only logical.

"How can it be radical to suggest that the very legal commitment already undertaken to end nuclear weapons must be fulfilled?

"I am a personal witness. The ways that so few others know, I have seen with my very own eyes and know with conviction that nuclear weapons must never again be visited upon humanity.

"This is not just an issue of treaty commitments of international law. Not just an issue of ethics and morality, though it is that, too. It is an issue of common sense.

"For the Marshallese and for myself, we know better. And we have reason to know better. Between 1946 and 1958, the US conducted 67 large scale tests. That is the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshimas every day for 12 years. Every day.

"These tests are not historical incidents, but created a pattern of human rights violations which persist to this day. During testing, our population was the subject of medical surveillance to measure the impact of fallout. "They are more like us than mice."

"Land remains unfit for resettlement, we cannot eat traditional food, and many people are nuclear nomads in a culture where 'land is identity'.

"We know, in ways that few other people know, why nuclear weapons must be eliminated. We may be poor, we may be brown, we may be from remote Pacific islands that many struggle to find on a map. But we should not be ignored.

"Nuclear weapons are a senseless threat to essential survival. And there are basic human and ethical norms, not to mention longstanding treaties, which compel those who possess them to pursue and achieve their elimination.

"The world must know that the humanitarian consequences could never, never justify this evil weapon. There is no human justification for allowing such risks to persist."

~ Tony de Brum

"It was a clear blue sky, with not a single cloud.

"I was in the middle of issuing the 8:13 alert for Hiroshima, and as I looked to speak to the person next to me, there was this flash of white. Smoke came in from the window. It was so white. They say that over 1000 degrees there is this white color.

"Everything was just all purple; the radioactive gas came in. Because I couldn't see anything I thought the intense light must have damaged my eyes. Then I started to see vaguely. The gas seemed like it was starting to settle. I looked around but I couldn't see any sign of anyone. It was quiet. So I thought I would go outside. I managed to stand up, and stepping over the tables, I made my way outside. I heard someone moan; I thought there was no one in the room. "Who is there?" I asked, but there was no reply. I made my way to her, and I saw it was my classmate, Iturasan. The two of us made our way to the top of the steps.

"When we got there we saw a scene we could never have imagined. There was no fire yet. The buildings were flattened. The radioactive gas was like a fog and we could not see even three meters in front of us. How could this be? ... We saw all the way to the horizon, there was just rubble. The whole city. Rubble, rubble, rubble.

~ Yoshie Oka

"In retaliation against the Department of the Interior's recognition that the department has no legal mandate to control the KBE Resettlement Trust Fund, this committee has introduced this legislation which frankly takes us back to a colonialist and paternalistic system that says the bureaucrats in a federal agency know what is best for the people of Bikini.

"Be assured we cannot move back with our families until the islands are cleaned up.

"When the U.S. told my ancestors that they would take care of us until we returned to our safe and clean land, Bikini Atoll, our ancestors actually believed the United States and allowed the United States to bomb our islands!

"Do we really think the U.S. Congress is going to fund the clean up and restoration of Bikini? No, we don't."

~ Anderson Jibas

"My mother, Mira Joshua Benjamin, was born on March 4, 1929, on Bikini Atoll. She is one of the few survivors from the 167 that were evacuated in 1946 still living today. She was a teenager when the US government asked them to move out of their home island (Bikini) so they can test their nuclear bombs for the good of mankind. They didn't have any choice, but took everything that they were able to take with them and left.

"They were relocated to a nearby island (Rongerik) which is about a couple of miles away from their home island. After three months of isolation, starvation, and not knowing what the U.S. government was doing to their home island, they were relocated again to Kwajalein, the US military base in the Marshall Islands. They lived on Kwajalein for a couple of months and then were relocated again to Kili Island. She has lived and seen it all.

"My mother moved to Springdale, Ark., at the end of the 1990s. She is living in a rented apartment with my older sister. Back in the Marshall Islands, she has her own house. Also, she has her own lands, lands given to her from her ancestors. Everything here in the United States costs money. Back home in the Marshall Islands, not everything costs money. People have their own lands and their own crops. People don't have to have these fancy things to live. Life is very simple and that is the kind of life my mother is used to.

"My mother wants to go back home to Bikini but cannot because it is still contaminated with radiation and people cannot live on the islands. She said that the US government promised them that they will return them to their home island but still haven't fulfilled their promise. Sometimes she wonders if she is ever going to go back home. Many of her family members have already died, most of them from cancer and other kinds of related illnesses from the nuclear testing on Bikini.

"The US government doesn't want to help them anymore with their medical issues and the Marshall Island government doesn't have money to compensate the nuclear victims. It seems that nobody cares about what had happened many, many years ago for the Bikinian people's sacrifice 'for the good of mankind.'"

~ Lumon Benjamin

