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Representing the International Coalition Against Nuclear Weapons

Statement for
The United Nations International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
September 26, 2016

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

I am the author of *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War*. Published last year for the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan, *Nagasaki* tells the stories of 5 young *hibakusha*—survivors of the 1945 nuclear attack—and the profound and enduring impact of nuclear war on them and the people of their city over 70 years.

Now, the survivors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima are aging, and their voices are slowly disappearing. They are the only people in history who have experienced nuclear warfare, and their message is urgently important to be heard as part of our effort to verifiably and irreversibly eliminate nuclear weapons across the globe.

So today, though I am not a *hibakusha*, as an American who spent 12 years interviewing Nagasaki survivors, physicians, and atomic bomb specialists, conducting research, and writing *Nagasaki*, I humbly step forward on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)—a coalition of 440 partner organizations in 98 countries— and in honor of all Nagasaki *hibakusha*, past and present, who have fervently fought for seven decades to ensure that Nagasaki is the last atomic-bombed city in history.

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To this end, last month during the final session of the United Nations' open-ended working group on nuclear disarmament in Geneva, 107 states expressed support for the convening of a conference in 2017 to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. This is an impressive achievement for every state that genuinely supports nuclear disarmament—including all African, Latin American, Caribbean, Southeast Asian, and Pacific states, as well as several European nations—that are united behind the proposal for immediate negotiations of a treaty banning nuclear weapons. This negotiation process must be open to all, blockable by none, and inclusive of civil society.

This ban treaty will offer states opposed to nuclear weapons an opportunity to formalize an unqualified rejection of the use or possession of nuclear weapons by anyone or any nation, under any circumstances. Even if the nuclear-armed states or others choose not to participate in the negotiations, this treaty—negotiated and signed by a majority of the world’s nation states—will have wide-ranging implications for nuclear disarmament, by prohibiting financial investments in nuclear weapons, pressuring nations on their military cooperation involving nuclear weapons, and intensifying the international stigma and rejection of these weapons throughout the world. The treaty will fortify the already-strong community of states and civil society organizations working towards the legal prohibition of nuclear weapons, and it will compel governments throughout the world to declare their ongoing support or rejection of these weapons. Such a treaty should not be seen as antagonistic towards nuclear-armed states but as supportive to all current and future disarmament and arms control efforts.

The collective international opposition to the current state of nuclear affairs has found a united voice and a pathway to action. The battle is far from over—we anticipate that some states will continue efforts to thwart progress, and that more than a prohibition treaty will be needed to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. But we are as close as we have ever been to launching a concerted, credible challenge to nuclear weapons, and we have the momentum and the moral authority to succeed. We appeal to all nations to support the open-ended working group’s recommendations for negotiating a legally-binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.

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For many people across the world, the historical image of the atomic bombings of Japan was—and still is—a mushroom cloud rising over Hiroshima or Nagasaki. These nuclear attacks are seen as abstract events of the past. But for *hibakusha*—survivors—of those cities, the war did not end in August 1945; for them, even now, the war is not fully over.

The sheer magnitude of those nuclear explosions, along with the incomprehensible number of people killed and injured, make it difficult to grasp what the people of Nagasaki and Hiroshima experienced. The explosive power of a single bomb crushed their homes, offices, schools, and hospitals, killing and trapping family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors for miles. The force of the blast caused people’s eyeballs to pop out of their sockets. The unimaginable heat released by the bombs melted iron, steel, and human skin—and caused fires to break out across the cities, resulting in conflagrations that burned people alive.

^{of the bombings}
Within weeks, adults and children began experiencing mysterious and excruciating symptoms: vomiting, fever, dizziness, bleeding gums, and hair loss. Purple spots began appearing all over their bodies—the effects of their high-dose, whole-body radiation exposure at the moment of the blast. Many died within a week of the appearance of their first symptoms.

Over the next nine months, pregnant women whose fetuses had been exposed in utero suffered spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and infant deaths—and many of the babies who survived birth developed physical and mental disabilities. Men, women, and children, in families or alone, lived in the atomic ruins surrounded by makeshift funeral pyres where bodies were burned continuously for months, engulfing the city in the stench of burning corpses.

Over the next few years, inside crude huts in the atomic ash, people cared for their injured, irradiated, and often dying loved ones even as many of the caregivers themselves were injured or ill. For many, the extreme psychological anguish from the instantaneous disappearance of their city and the loss of entire families and communities never lifted. Suicides were common.

Five years after the bombing, leukemia and other cancer rates among *hibakusha* spiked, wreaking terror among survivors: When would their turn come? For decades, expectant parents who had been exposed to the bombs' radiation were petrified of the potential genetic effects on their newborn infants. Many hovered over their children for years, afraid that each cough or stomach ache could lead to severe illness or death. Even today, radiation scientists are actively studying second and third generation *hibakusha* for genetic effects potentially passed down to them from their parents and grandparents, reminding us how much we still don't understand about the insidious nature of radiation exposure to the human body.

The world's nuclear-armed nations insist that nuclear weapons exist as a deterrent to war—an irony that is not lost on *hibakusha*, who find it absurd and angering that nuclear weapons are declared to be instruments of peace.

^{Nagasaki}
On the morning of the bombing, sixteen-year-old Taniguchi Sumiteru was delivering mail on his bicycle in the northwestern corner of ^{the city} ~~Nagasaki~~, over a mile from the hypocenter. The tremendous force and searing heat of the bomb's blast rushed at him from behind. He was blown off his bicycle and slammed face-down onto the road. ^{He did not know yet that his} ~~His~~ entire back was burned off.

Taniguchi should have never survived, but he did, lying on his stomach for three years and seven months before he could sit, stand, and eventually walk. Now 87, he seethes when he hears arguments that nuclear weapons keep the peace. For Taniguchi, always drained from the physical

pain he endures each day, there is only one meaning for the word “peace,” and it does not include nuclear weapons. “The atomic bomb,” he says quietly, “is a destroyer of peace.”

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Whether by military order, accident, or an act of terrorism, and with immensely more powerful nuclear weapons today, we are now at high risk for far worse humanitarian and environmental nuclear disasters than Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The only way to prevent such cataclysmic annihilation is the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons and the establishment of a new era without these instruments of mass terror positioned throughout the world. No other measure can achieve this goal.

In memory of the hundreds of thousands who died 71 years ago and in the years that followed, and the countless more *hibakusha* who faced the terrors of post-nuclear survival, may their courage, strength, and perseverance infuse us with these same qualities so that every nation finds within itself the courage to eliminate nuclear weapons at home and advocate for this mission across the globe.

~~We anticipate that at the General Assembly's First Committee next month, states supportive of the open-ended working group's recommendation will put forward a resolution to convene a~~
→ ~~welcome and support Austria's pledge to~~ *we enthusiastically*
conference in 2017 to negotiate a comprehensive, legally-binding treaty banning nuclear weapons. In solidarity, and on behalf of peace and dignity for people and all life throughout the world, we strongly urge all governments to support this initiative and participate constructively in next year's negotiations as a necessary and historic step toward the total and permanent elimination of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.