

## Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict & Peace Boat

# **NEWSLETTER**



Welcome to our very first newsletter as the Improving Practice Working Group (IPWG) within the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) At GPPAC, we're passionate about sharing knowledge and building connections. We create practical tools, such as toolkits and training manuals, to support peacebuilding both in person and online. Our webinars feature inspiring speakers discussing topics like leadership, community policing, and innovative online learning. Through training courses and our active Community of Practice, we bring people together from different regions to exchange ideas, develop solutions, and keep our network strong and vibrant

To mark the launch of our first newsletter, we're beginning with a powerful moment of reunion and collaboration that took place aboard the iconic Peace Boat — a Japanese Peacebuilding NGO and member of the GPPAC network that represents Northeast Asia.

A bit about Peace Boat: Founded in 1983, Peace Boat is an international nongovernmental organisation based in Japan. They promote peace, human rights, intercultural exchange, and sustainability through educational world voyages.

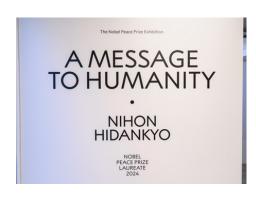
## Where our paths crossed: Time for Peace, 120<sup>th</sup> Global Voyage

2025. Eighty years since the atomic bombs fell upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki, causing immense destruction and suffering. Upon this anniversary and connected to Peaceboat's advocacy for a nuclear-free world, GPPAC members received a generous invite to join the special voyage, Time for Peace and share messages about peace. This is how part of the Improving Practice Group – peacebuilding members coming from India, Lebanon, Mexico, Palestine, Serbia, and the United States – joined Peace Boats' enriching voyage for five days.

part of the commemoration anniversary of the atomic bombing, the Nobel Peace Center's Nobel Peace Prize Exhibition "A Message to Humanity " exhibition was onboard the Pacific World. Having this touching exhibition onboard, knowing it will visit over 20 ports in 19 countries and reach communities close and far, was lovely to see. A unique and deserving place for such a poignant exhibition, that raises awareness through images and text on the awful consequences of nuclear weapons. Besides powerful images lie books containing hundreds stories from Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors, or Hibakusha.

"A message to Humanity" amplifies the voices of Hibakusha by showing the life and dreams lost under the "mushroom cloud", as well as the years of dedication and advocacy by Nihon Hidankyo (the Japanese organization for survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and allies to send a clear message: nuclear weapons must never be used again.









#### Porto, Portugal, to Zeebrugge, Belgium

Sunday, June 8th to Thursday, June 12th. That was our itinerary onboard the Peace Boat., and we loved every minute of it! After quite a bitlots of planning and fantastic support from our friends at Peace Boat, six of us were all set to go. With enthusiasm of meeting in person (for the first time for some of us), the intrigue of knowing more about Peace Boat's activities onboard, and the important and troubling moment the world is facing in conflicts, increased militarisation, and environmental destruction, we traveled from our respective corners of the world to our meeting place, Porto, eager to embrace in solidarity!

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **DAY 1: PORTO**



First stop: Porto! We met around noon, received an introduction on board (the usual... how to avoid getting lost in the 14 levels - of course, without floor 13 for good luck sailing- how to avoid falling off the ship, etc.), and we were ready to go. We exchanged our passports for a room card and began feeling the energy of the boat. One of our first stops was the exhibition "A Message to Humanity," mentioned above, setting the tone quite perfectly for our days full of reflection, remembrance, discussion, and commitment to healing and learning from the past to move towards more just and peaceful societies

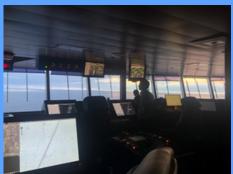
#### **DAY 2: DAY AT SEA**

FFriday morning, the first day of the trip, and what a way to wake up –seeing the sea on all horizons! The sensation of being surrounded by water, seeing the immensity of the sea and the beauty and depth of the unknown darkness below us, changes your perspective. The sea reminds us of the oneness of it all; it is a reminder that we are all connected.

he entire duration of the trip, sharing their stories advocating for a nuclear-free world.

We were invited to meet the captain and the navigation team at "the bridge" - bursting with screens, nautical charts, maps and myriad buttons





We later headed to a theatre-style space to present the GPPAC network and the work we promote within the Improving Practice Working Group (IPWG). We were met with a diverse and curious crowd of people. Our friends at Peace Boat then organised a smaller discussion space for those who wanted to hear more. The group discussion allowed for more engagement with folks from around the world. We had a frank exchange about what gives us the energy to continue doing the peacebuilding work we do despite tremendous challenges and violent conflicts, and strategies for navigating a world that limits funding for peace initiatives and moves towards war funding.





From there we sat down with Ito Masao and Kuramori Terumi, two survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings whose stories we had the privilege to listen to. Here we were, sitting in a circle with Ito and Kuramori, 85 and 81 years old respectively, as they were reliving the day their lives changed. Because of their young age, most of their story focused on the after: how the atomic bombing that fell on their cities altered their lives, and how their lives and those around them continued amid such collective harm. The silent suffering, the silent kitchen tables, separated families. And the incredible persistence, resistance and light that can come from even the darkest moments. It was a gift be in the company of Kuramori and Ito and to witness their call for peace. See pages 8 and 10 for more on their stories.



#### **DAY 4: LE HAVRE**

June 11th. The ship docked at "Le Havre", a major French port in Normandy, northern France.

From the deck, we could see cargo ships actively loading and unloading goods. A group of six of us set off toward Honfleur, a historic town about 40 minutes away.

At the time of its completion, the Pont de Normandie held records both for the longest cable-stayed bridge in the world and for the longest span between its piers - over 250 meters (820 feet) longer than the previous record-holder. Although it lost this title in 1999 to the Tatara Bridge in Japan and again in 2004 to the Rio-Antirrio Bridge in Greece, it remains an engineering marvel.

Honfleur, with its origins dating back to the 11th century, has a rich and complex history. The town changed hands several times during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), with the last English occupation ending in 1450. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, Honfleur thrived through trade with North America and Asia. Notably, French explorer Samuel de Champlain set sail from Honfleur in 1608 to found Quebec. In the 19th century, Le Havre overtook it as a major port, and Honfleur gradually transformed into a seaside resort beloved by artists and writers - many of whom were born there.

The timber Church of Sainte-Catherine, built in the 15th century by shipbuilders, resembles an upside-down boat. Its wooden belfry, located separately in the Place du Marché, adds to the village's charm.

Walking into Honfleur felt like stepping back in time to the 19th century.

One could almost imagine meeting the townspeople of that era. The beautiful marina lies nestled among rows of well-preserved stone houses. Our restaurant was in one such house, with a terrace offering a perfect view of the town centre. Over delicious fish, fresh salad, and locally made apple cider, we were inspired to generate new ideas for upcoming events. A regular newsletter could motivate new members to join the group, while keeping current ones engaged.

These moments of interaction, joy, and friendship nourish our collective energy and contribute to our professional work.

The world today is in turmoil. Ongoing wars, climate change, and the rise of authoritarian regimes are affecting people's lives all over the globe. Each of us in the group has experience working on peacebuilding in conflict, post-conflict, or crisis-affected contexts. Resilience has become a vital skill.

- helping us adapt to unpredictable situations, survive crises, and continue contributing to local



#### LIVED EXPERIENCES ON BOARD

"The days onboard were filled with rich conversations, meaningful connections and cultural exchange. We couldn't think of a better way to begin this newsletter series than by sharing the highlights and reflections from such a memorable gathering. Join us on this journey aboard the Peace Boat".

In the spring of 2025, I fulfilled an item on my bucket list, joining the Peace Boat on a short leg of its 120th voyage around the world.

We met two Hibakusha (He Ba ku Sha), atomic bomb survivors and had a long chat. Their testimony puts a face to what US historians have sanitized in the psyche of citizens by showing only the mushroom cloud and not the horrific aftermath of the bomb.

Ito told us of his hatred of Americans, but that some medicines from the US were helping him. Along with medical supplies, he received a bible and started reading it. When he came to the part where he read "love your enemies... and pray for them", he threw the book against the wall out of disgust. Later, though, he met a pastor who helped him understand those words. I later told Ito over dinner that my faith tradition tries to take those words seriously, even to the point of not fighting the US Wars and doing alternative service.

As I listened to Ito, I was acutely aware of several competing voices in my head. The first was a nationalistic narrative, based on the passport I carry around the USA. It went something like this . . . "Well, a million US lives were saved by using the bomb. US soldiers would have had to island hop toward the Japanese mainland, and it would have been a bloody conquest indeed to end the war." This is the story created by US historians to justify the use of such a horrific weapon. Besides, somebody had to invent this first bomb and better the forces of freedom and democracy than... blah blah blah." This is the narrative that depicts the bomb from the air, a mushroom cloud, an aloof and distant view of the destruction.

Another voice pokes through my consciousness as I listen to Ito. It is the one that has run counter to the national story since I was a child. It is that of my Anabaptist forbears, and my current faith community, who took the words of Jesus seriously to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. My faith community has taken these hard words and organized their lives around them. Countering the dominant cultural narrative ever since has cost them dearly in the protestant or catholic city-states in Europe. This voice wants to offer a personal defense to Ito by saying that I belong to such a community, one that resisted killing and refused military service. Yet the actions of those few failed to stop the march toward the nuclear age with its planet-killing potential.

The final voice competing in my head with the personal stories of the Hibakusha compels me, as a US citizen, Anabaptist Christian and human being, just to shut up and listen. What can I say as I hear of lost loved ones? Not just lost but vaporized, burned beyond recognition and doomed to die a slow, painful death from radiation poisoning? What can be said when hearing those first-hand accounts except to sit and listen? Share the pain? That is the peacebuilder voice that understands the first step in healing is a mindful, open-hearted listening that trusts the presence and solidarity as the first steps to reconciliation, healing and preventing future atrocities.

-lonathan





For me, it was also a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness about and amplify the voices of those impacted by the ongoing cruelties in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including especially the indescribable horrors that are being perpetrated in Gaza and the Northern West Bank. The disjunct between the few days of ease and happy camaraderie during the meeting, and the devastating reality where I live, has been brought back to me every day since the trip as accounts of new daily atrocities emerge; most recently (in addition to the shooting of literally starving civilians young and old as they try to get desperately needed food and water) the systematic destruction of all that remains of the infrastructure in this 4000 year old historic region and the plans for herding and confining all the inhabitants into one giant concentration camp. The Peace Boat gave me a platform to talk and to show Palestinian grassroots films to an audience of more than 400, giving me a platform to share the humanity as well as the appalling daily suffering of Palestinians, making my time on the Peace Boat especially meaningful.

I enjoyed being at sea and being shown around the boat, including the bridge and the workings of the enormous ship. Who would have imagined, for instance, that just a tiny joystick could control such a vast floating city? In particular, though, I was also deeply moved by the exhibition from the Nobel Peace Prize by the peace prize winners Nihon Hidankyo (of ICAN of which Peace Boat is part of the steering committee, so they share in the Nobel prize), and by the testimonies we heard from the Hibakusha, the survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their dignity, their deeply human approach made a profound impression on me, and especially with the recent focus on nuclear escalation in the Middle East, made me even more aware of the need to put every effort towards stopping all nuclear proliferation. With the world rushing headlong into increased militarisation and hurtling us towards nuclear doomsday, we need these witnesses and every kind of realistic, sobering reminder to stop this insanity. It is indeed not only "Time for Peace" – but it is long overdue.

-Lucy





One of the most meaningful moments on the Peace Boat happened on a windy afternoon when we met Ito Masao and Kuramori Terumi, both atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Ito was just four years old and Kuramori one year old when the bombs fell in their cities, and their lives – as many other lives around them – changed forever.

Ito starts his story by describing what seemed like another morning. He was riding his tricycle near his home when the blast of the bomb sent him to the ground and made him lose consciousness. As he recounts the devastating images from the following days and weeks that are engraved in his memory, he also expresses his internal aversion towards the U.S. Here was a country that had bombed his city, that had killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, that had disrupted and altered his life completely. His feelings of animosity transformed as he encountered people from the U.S. – including young soldiers – visiting the Hiroshima memorial museum, where he has been a volunteer for over twenty years. He describes meeting people from the U.S. who believe that, thanks to the dropping of the bomb, the war ended earlier, and thus it was necessary to end the war and save millions of lives. But he also describes meetings with U.S. soldiers in tears upon reading the indiscriminate destruction of the atomic bomb. Ito wraps up his story with a powerful message: "Through making friends with the other, we can build peace."

Kuramori has no direct memory of the atomic bomb drop on Nagasaki. Although she was only a baby then, the A-bomb shaped a significant part of her life, in the decades-long discrimination that Hibakusha faced. She explains that at the time, people had much fear since the effects of radiation were not known. This came with stigmatization and silence. Her parents never spoke of their experience as survivors, and neither did she. It was not until her grandson in high school started to get involved in a movement gathering signatures to abolish nuclear weapons that she was first asked about the atomic bomb and being a Hibakusha.

She was so moved by her grandson's involvement that she joined him. It was through her travels and encounters that she met survivors, in Japan and – surprisingly to her – in Korea and even in the United States. Since Korea was under Japanese colonialism at the time, many Koreans had been brought forcefully to Japan as workers and had

When ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Kuramori travelled to the US, to the place where materials for the atomic bombs were produced. Indigenous people had been removed for nuclear facilities to be built. Nonetheless, some were exposed to radiation by their own government. The same government that forcibly imprisoned Japanese in remote camps. Kuramori recognized that survivors were not only in Japan, and there were layers of pain, death and damage felt by many citizens.

suffered from the atomic bomb drop. She connected with them and felt sorry for the role Japan played.

As the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II approaches, the number of Hibakusha still with us dwindles. For decades, hundreds of people like Kura-chan and Ito-san (as they are referred to by many on the Peace Boat) have relentlessly shared their story and call for nuclear disarmament and peace. And yet, the struggle against nuclear arms is just as relevant today. These past weeks, with Israel's launch of surprise attacks on key military and nuclear facilities in Iran and the growing tensions between the U.S. and Russia, we are reminded of the fragile and dangerous armed world we live in, which can detonate if in the wrong hands.

"We may not have much power, but we are not powerless", Kura-chan mentioned at one point.

Let us take her and Ito-san's words to heart and build upon the lessons of the past: For a world that recognizes the horrors of war and does not take them lightly, calls out against nuclear weapons and their catastrophic harm, warns of blind state militarization, and stands for all living things.



IPWG wants new members and wider representation from across the network

All GPPAC Members can join. If you are interested in learning and are willing to contribute, please write to us with an expression of interest

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