

Mr Kishida Fumio,

In October last year, upon your appointment, I sent a letter calling on you, as the Prime Minister of Japan from Hiroshima, to take leadership toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. Since then, I have been greatly encouraged each time you have sent a strong message for a world free of nuclear weapons. Your confirmation of cooperation for this goal during your meeting with President Biden of the United States was very heartening.

However, a fearful situation continues in the world today, with Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. The scenes of many civilians becoming victims is devastating. The fighting shows no sign of ending, and more and more people are being displaced. People are raising their voices for an immediate ceasefire all around the world, including within Russia. I am one of the people with such a sincere hope.

Yet, President Putin has made statements to the extent of even threatening the use of nuclear weapons, and it is reported that he has ordered the military to make such preparations. As someone who experienced first-hand the horrors of the atomic bomb dropped by the United States in August 1945, such a nuclear threat is something I cannot accept. Just one nuclear bomb obliterated the city of Hiroshima. A 13-year-old girl at the time, I crawled out of the rubble and survived. The horrific scenes I saw then, and my feelings for each and every family member and friend whose lives were so cruelly taken, is the driving force behind my efforts to continue until today to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Prime Minister Kishida, now is the time to raise your voice and declare that the use or threat of nuclear weapons can never be condoned. Please send this message to the entire world. The world now needs this voice from Hiroshima.

Hearing that some politicians in Japan are in this context calling for a debate about "nuclear sharing" caused me great shock and confusion. I understand "nuclear sharing" to mean Japan's joint use of nuclear weapons systems of the United States, including their deployment within Japan. This would mean that Japan would join nuclear weapons operations of the United States. How can such a thing be accepted by Japan, which has experienced the atomic bombings?

In response to such discussions, as Prime Minister you immediately and clearly denied this possibility, stating that it is unacceptable from the standpoint of upholding Japan's Three Non-Nuclear Principles. I was relieved to hear this. It is Japan's role to convey to the world the horrific, inhumane consequences that would ensue if nuclear weapons were used. There should be no choice for Japan to join those potentially using such weapons.

It is of course understandable that in the face of ongoing war, more people will feel uncertain about their lives and the security of their country. However, what is needed in such a time is not bringing in nuclear weapons, nor preparing for war. Now is the time to strengthen international law prohibiting nuclear weapons, and to abolish them. There are many nuclear weapon free zones around the world already, as a way to build security which does not rely upon nuclear weapons. There are already proposals for such a zone in East Asia, including Japan, and many experts making recommendations towards this. Japan should utilize its pacifist constitution to move these discussions forward.

As the world now faces the potential crisis of nuclear war, the significance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), defining these weapons as inhumane, becomes even greater. The first Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty, to be held this summer, will be an important opportunity to reconfirm the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, to guarantee the rights of victims and survivors who have been harmed by nuclear testing, and to discuss pathways to ensure that no nuclear catastrophe is ever repeated.

Prime Minister, you have clearly stated that the TPNW is a “very important treaty as an exit point of achieving a world without nuclear weapons.” I am grateful to you for being the first Prime Minister of Japan to recognize the importance of this Treaty. Now, I urge you to take a step toward this “exit point.”

It is no exaggeration to say that the actions of Japan, the country that experienced atomic bombings, hold the key to whether the countries of the world will fall into a cycle of nuclear threats and continue down the road to catastrophe, or, instead, will together reason their way out of nuclear terror.

I call upon you to attend the first Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW, and to state clearly your position that Japan will lead the world in realizing the goals of the Treaty. I truly believe that this is the heartfelt wish of the Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of all people who lost their families and loved ones to the atomic bomb.

Setsuko Thurlow
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