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It is not easy, in fact it is painful to share my memories of August 6, 1945. I am here, however, with prayerful thoughts to share these memories with you because I believe that you are the people who can influence the decision makers who determine the survival of mankind.

As a 13-year-old high school student I was mobilized and trained to work for the army as an assistant in coding and decoding secret messages. At that time of explosion I was in the army headquarters about 1.8 km from the hypocentre. The moment I saw the bluish white flash I had the sensation of my body floating in the air. When I regained consciousness I found myself trapped in the debris in total darkness and stillness. I could not move and believed that I was about to die. I heard classmates whisper, “God help me” and “Mother help me”. Then suddenly a soldier loosened the timbers around me and helped me to crawl out of the burning ruins.

The scene which met my eyes was surreal and like hell on earth. Although it was morning it was as dark as twilight from the smoke, dust and particles in the air. Flames were shooting up from the ruined buildings, dead bodies burned, blackened and swollen littered the ground and the stench of burnt flesh filled the air. I began to see streams of ghost-like figures slowly shuffling from the city centre to the nearby hills. Parts of their bodies were missing, skin and flesh was hanging from their bones, some were holding their eyeballs in their hands, and others had intestines hanging out from their burst open abdomens. Tragically only a very small number of victims received even first aid because of the collapse of the health care system in the bombing.

Two other girls and I joined the procession of ghostly figures, carefully stepping over the dead and dying, to escape to the nearby hills. At the foot of the hill was an army training ground about the size of two football fields, which was virtually covered with the dead or dying, whispering, “water, please give me water”. We went to a nearby stream to wash the blood and dirt from our bodies. Not having any containers to carry water, we tore our blouses, soaked them in the stream, and hurried back to hold them to the mouths of the dying. We were busy all day at this primitive relief operation. At no time on the training ground did I see any health care professionals or medical supplies of any kind. As the darkness fell we sat on the hillside stunned by the massive death and suffering we had seen, watching the entire city burn.

Most of my schoolmates, along with grade 7 and 8 students from all the high schools of the city, had been mobilized to clear fire lanes through the city. Out in the open and near

the centre of the city they were completely exposed to the blast and heat. Nearly all of the 8000-9000 students were killed, many simply vaporized. My sister-in-law, a teacher supervising her students there, shared their fate, leaving her two young children as orphans. Similarly, about 5000 elementary school children who had been evacuated to the countryside returned to the city to find their homes and families gone.

Since I was in a building I was shielded from the heat and partly protected from the radiation. I did develop, however, some symptoms of radiation sickness common among many residents at that time, such as loss of hair, internal bleeding and bleeding from the gums and so forth. In the case of my uncle and aunt who were in the suburbs, they started developing purple spots all over their bodies. My parents who nursed them reported that their internal organs seemed to be dissolving and coming out in a thick black liquid. My sister and her 4-year-old son were burned beyond recognition and were identifiable only by their voices and by a unique hairpin that my sister wore. We nursed them until death released them from their agony. It is horrifying to think that even today, after 63-1/2 years, people are still dying in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and survivors still fear the possibility of the delayed effects of radiation.

Thus my beloved, busy and bustling city of Hiroshima suddenly became death and desolation, looking smaller to my eyes and with an eerie atmosphere. But the destruction was not only physical but the social, cultural and economic fabric of the community was shattered.

Since the Japanese government offered no support for survivors' needs for livelihood and medical care for 12 years, initially homeless people had to sleep on contaminated ground, in ruined public buildings and under bridges.

The fact that exposed pregnant women gave birth to deformed babies, ugly keloid scars appeared on young women of marriageable age, and the chronic fatigue of many survivors contributed to strong social discrimination in marriage, rental accommodation, employment, and so on. Many hid their identity as survivors to avoid discrimination.

Another socio/political factor of censorship and confiscation of anything to do with human suffering caused by the atomic bombing, affected survivors' process of psychological recovery from their trauma.

With the end of the US occupation a flood of information on the atomic bombing became freely available. Survivors for the first time could begin to see the significance of their experience in a global context and historical perspective. We realized that we were entering the nuclear age with a potential to destroy civilization and annihilate mankind. We saw the meaning of our survival as warning the world of this danger, and made the commitment to ensure that no other human beings experience what we had gone through. We believe that humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist. We urgently call for the total abolition of nuclear weapons and a cultural transformation away from our obsession with violence and war.