

Side event Seiko Ueno Speech

My name is Seiko Ueno from Hiroshima. I am a second-generation Hibakusha. My mother survived the atomic bombing when she was just twelve years old. At the time, she was one kilometre away from the hypocentre.

My mother did not talk much about her experiences. Yet, the trauma she went through never left her, and she was forced to live with it. One day, when the skin of a piece of chicken burst while being heated in the microwave, she screamed, "This is the atomic bomb!" Once, when I asked her to draw what she went through on the day, she said, "I can't draw it." Her face was contorted as she spoke. Yet, she picked up red, blue, and black crayons, and drew dozens of circles, whispering, "It was hell."

My mother lived to the age of 63. For many years, she struggled with high blood pressure and diabetes, yet refused to receive treatment at a hospital, which made her condition worsen. In her later years, she had to undergo dialysis and suffered multiple heart attacks, ultimately passing away.

I believe the research conducted by the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) was one of the reasons she refused to receive treatment at a hospital. This commission was established by The U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 1946 to investigate the lasting physical impact on the survivors. Once, she told me, "Their objective is solely examination, not to provide treatment. We, Hibakusha, are just guinea pigs. I can't trust doctors."

The ABCC's investigations continued with the descendants to study the effects on the children of Hibakusha. When I was in high school, I was asked to visit the ABCC for an examination. I later found out that this was part of a "Mortality Study on Second-Generation Hibakusha." My mother tried to refuse it multiple times, warning me, "I do not know what they will do to you if you go." But in the end, she had no choice but to comply, which was deeply distressing for her.

Eight years ago, I was able to access records from the Radiation Effects Research Foundation, which replaced the ABCC in 1975 and is jointly funded by the U.S. and Japan. (These are the records.) These documents described the scene: a twelve-year-old child desperately surviving all alone. She crawled out from under her collapsed home and swam across a river. The documents also detailed her deep anger and anxiety in the aftermath, including notes on her "refusal to be treated by foreign doctors" and her "fear of being alone."

The health anxiety caused by the atomic bomb has been passed down from my mother to me, and now to my children. We, the second-generation Hibakusha, are enduring an intergenerational chain of nuclear harm. And to this day, the Radiation Effects Research Foundation's investigations on descendants are still ongoing. Currently, they are researching our genomes.

Once, when I mentioned that I was a second-generation Hibakusha, someone asked me, "Is it contagious?" I was speechless. The reality that prejudice and discrimination against Hibakusha and second-generation Hibakusha still exist, makes me sad.

I believe this prejudice and these stereotypes exist even today. The existence and possession of nuclear weapons does not mean that only "someone far away" will suffer. As long as these weapons exist, everyone would be a victim, without any exception. I strongly believe that Humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist together. Thank you.