

## Peace Message (2021 Hiroshima City Peace Memorial Ceremony)

On this day, marking the 76th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, on behalf of all people of Hiroshima Prefecture, I wish to offer my humble and sincere prayers for the souls of those who lost their lives to the atomic bombing. I would also like to extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved families and express my heartfelt sympathies to the *hibakusha*, the atomic bomb survivors, who are even today enduring long-term health effects.

We know well that many innocent civilians died here, suffering from pains and terrible thirst. We know this fact from testimonies of the *hibakusha* and the exhibits of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. We owe this to the *hibakusha* who have awakened memories of those days—which are intolerable even to recall—and have continued to give testimony based on their direct experience. It is said that the testimonies of the *hibakusha* were a major driving force behind the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in January of this year. However, the witnesses who have passed on their memories to the next generation are aging, and the transmission of memories that hold our imagination and interest, and sometimes inspire world leaders, is in danger of being lost. Now is the time to confront nuclear weapons as a matter of urgency.

Even though an act of an individual citizen seems to have only limited power, by involving many people, it can sometimes create an unpredictable surge of action and change the world. Regarding global environmental issue, for example, a 15-year-old Swedish girl has been in the vanguard of progress in environmental protection. The School Strikes for Climate, which she began in front of the Swedish parliament, involved many young people from various parts of the world; she has subsequently grown more and more influential, until she finally drove ministers of several countries and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to take action. This girl, Ms. Greta Thunberg, took the first step, but what is equally important is that many young people shared her concerns and joined forces with her. When many people respond to a call and join social movements, they can propel efforts to build a better society together while prompting debate. Growing attention on climate change, education and gender equality has changed the approaches of national leaders in their respective countries, making the SDGs a globally common concept and creating a great surge of action all over the world.

Even though an individual person may seem to have only limited power, by raising our own awareness and taking small steps, we can change the global paradigm.

Over the past one-and-a-half years, the world has been battling against COVID-19. Even though some specialists had sounded the alarm on the risk of a pandemic, we were not prepared for such an outbreak because we did not pay sufficient heed to their warnings. As a result, around 200 million people around the world have been infected with the disease to date, and more than four million people have died.

Concerning nuclear weapons, many specialists, including ministers and military officers of nuclear-weapon states who were formerly responsible for nuclear operations, warn that nuclear weapons endanger the very survival of humanity and the whole earth. Just as we overlooked the risk of the present pandemic, are we overlooking the risk of nuclear weapons, the pressing risk that faces us at this very moment? If so, this will lead to the destruction of humanity and the earth.

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The only path we can take to ensure human survival is to make each and every person aware of this risk and confront the insanity of retaining nuclear weapons. Hiroshima is determined to take new action. We will work even harder to make nuclear abolition a unanimous goal of the United Nations. Now is the time to take action, amid the pandemic that engulfs all people around the world. I would like to encourage every single person to stand up and work together to ensure the very survival of the human race.

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