

Message from Kazumi Matsui, Mayor of Hiroshima
to the 86th Annual Meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors, Boston, MA
10 June 2018

First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the United States Conference of Mayors for its ongoing support of Mayors for Peace as expressed in its resolutions, adopted annually since 2004. It is an honor and a pleasure to have the opportunity to address you.

As mayor of Hiroshima, I serve as the President of Mayors for Peace, an international non-partisan, non-governmental organization. More than 7,500 member cities in 163 countries and regions –including 213 U.S. cities, are working together to achieve two key objectives: “Realization of a world without nuclear weapons”; and “Realization of safe and resilient cities”, which, we believe, will lead us to our ultimate goal, lasting world peace.

Let me tell you a little bit about my city and its citizens. Almost seventy-three years ago, on August 6, 1945, a single atomic bomb reduced the city to ruins. Those who barely managed to survive have been tormented by lifelong suffering. They have gone through the excruciating sorrow of losing their beloved families and friends, the long-term effects of radiation, and constant anxiety about their health and the health of their children and grandchildren. Having experienced unbearable devastation and sorrow, the A-bomb survivors – known as “hibakusha”, have reached the unshakable conviction that “no one shall ever again suffer as we have”. The average age of the hibakusha is now over 81 years, yet they continue to passionately appeal for nuclear abolition and world peace. Their earnest desire is to witness the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons in their lifetime.

The indescribable devastation and sorrow experienced by the hibakusha is not a thing of the past. As long as nuclear weapons exist, and national leaders threaten their use, nuclear war could erupt at any moment – by accident, miscalculation or design.

On January 25th of this year, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of its “Doomsday Clock” to 2 minutes to midnight, as close as it’s ever been set since its inception in 1947, citing “the failure of . . . world leaders to deal with looming threats of nuclear war and climate change” and stating, “the world is not only more dangerous now than it was a year ago; it is as threatening as it has been since World War II”.

Indeed, tensions between the United States and Russia have risen to levels not seen since the Cold War. And this is only one of many nuclear flashpoints, from the Korean Peninsula, to the South China Sea, to the Middle East and South Asia, where all of the nuclear-armed states are engaged in unpredictable conflicts that could catastrophically escalate out of control. To make matters worse, all of the nuclear-armed states are spending billions of dollars to modernize and upgrade their arsenals – money that could be much more constructively spent to meet the needs of cities and their people.

No one can predict how the US-North Korea Summit will affect Northeast Asia or how the uncertain future of the JCPOA will affect the Middle East. I sincerely hope that world leaders will resolve these and other pressing global issues through peaceful means and demonstrate good faith leadership in efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. In this regard, I would also like to ask everyone here to take up the hibakushas' urgent appeal for the creation of a world without nuclear weapons and to take your own actions that reflect their fervent wish.

As awareness of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons has spread, so has the global call for their prohibition and elimination. However, we are not making any progress on actual disarmament, and I fear that the situation could even regress. We need a breakthrough now, and I am here to share my sense of urgency with you, my fellow mayors.

The common challenge faced by all mayors is to ensure the safety and peaceful lives of our citizens. To this end, Mayors for Peace encourages member cities to work together across national borders and to cultivate mutual trust and respect. We also support member cities' efforts to address their own national and regional priorities, such as climate change, homelessness, migration, gun violence and terrorism. As we pursue our common goals of a world without nuclear weapons and lasting world peace, we honor each member's autonomy in building safe and resilient cities.

In the United States, we are very pleased to have Des Moines as a Vice-President of Mayors for Peace and a Lead City. We encourage U.S. members, led by Des Moines, to act at the municipal level to raise public awareness about the growing danger of war as well as the need for creating safe and resilient cities and a peaceful world without nuclear weapons to ensure sustainable development. We sincerely hope that US member cities, led by Des Moines, will engage in proactive activities of their own and take initiative in realizing the peaceful world hibakusha have been fervently wishing for. The Hiroshima Secretariat will not spare any efforts to support US member cities' initiatives for peace.

In closing, I would like to invite all U.S. mayors to join Mayors for Peace and help us reach our goal of 10,000 member cities by 2020. Please help Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie build a strong U.S. chapter! It is my sincere hope going forward that we will continue to deepen collaboration between the United States Conference of Mayors and Mayors for Peace.

Thank you for your kind attention.