

The 8th General Conference of Mayors for Peace

# **A-bomb Survivor Testimony**

*August 3 (Sat), 2013 14:45-15:45*

*International Conference Center Hiroshima (Phoenix Hall)*

**Keijiro Matsushima**

## **MC**

Now we would like to have the A-bomb testimony and the speaker is Keijiro Matsushima. He was 16 years old, a student of Hiroshima Industrial College when he was A-bombed in the center of Hiroshima. After the war, he worked as an English teacher of a junior high school and with that skill, he has spoken about his experience in English, and again today, he will speak in English to convey his message. Mr. Matsushima, please.

## **Mr. Keijiro Matsushima**

Honorable mayors, ladies, and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure and honor for me to meet you all, such important and influential persons from many countries of the world and to talk to you about my experience on the A-bombing. Surely, we, all the citizens of Hiroshima, welcome you all and we appreciate greatly your visit to Hiroshima because we believe it is very important for us all to learn from the past, even if it was such a bitter experience, we should learn a lesson. A little about my background, my city. You can see the map of Hiroshima here. Hiroshima is a delta city with many rivers like this. There used to be several rivers – these days there are six. We combined two to each one. And surrounded with small mountains like this. This is open to inland sea. Here is the harbor, Hiroshima Harbor. And you see a railroad line. The main line runs this way, Hiroshima, Yokogawa, and Koi stations. And two lines go north and a street car runs this way and that. That is almost everything about our city.

As you see, the US Air Force has succeeded to hit the real center of the city, here. The A-bomb detonated about 500 meters above ground zero. As you see, this circle zone of two kilometer radius circle zone was destroyed completely. When you see such a modern city of today, Hiroshima, it is very difficult to imagine the devastation just after the bombing. But once this city was just a field of ash.

I was born here, on the east side of the city at the foot of this small mountain. Parents and three boys and I was the youngest. And we were brought up here. Before the war, Hiroshima was just a middle sized, quiet city. Population was around 400,000. Quiet. Not so rich, a poor city. But we were happy anyway, and we were brought up here. But when I was in elementary school, the war in China started. I didn't think much at that time, I was just a little kid. But when I graduated from elementary school and I entered middle school in the year 1941, that year in December, the war in the United States and Allied Forces started. That was a very bad war. Sorry, at that time we were just excited. Very successful attack to Pearl Harbor, we boys were just excited.

And the war started and continued on. A long war, 1941, 2, 3, 4, 5. My middle school days were full of war. My two brothers went to the Navy and to the war. But as you know, Japan began to lose the war and the situation became worse and worse. My middle school days were just miserable I think. A shortage of all kinds of material and food was more and more difficult of course. One year before the end of the war, 1944, in the summer time, most of the islands in the Pacific Ocean were occupied by US forces and they immediately built air bases on these islands. And in the fall, they started the direct bombing to mainland Japan. That year, we school students were all mobilized to work in factories – no more schooling. Imagine hungry and work, real hard days.

In 1945, the last year of the war, the situation was the worst. As you know, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, Tokyo was bombed completely and over 100 thousand citizens were killed in a big, big air raid. But you see, this kind of big air raid continued to most of the big cities throughout Japan; Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe, Okayama, all flattened and a lot of citizens were killed. But somehow, very strange, Hiroshima was okay. No bombing. Only once or twice, one or two bombers came in, but I don't know exactly. Hiroshima was safe.

But that year, springtime, very bad in my family too. My father died because he was ill and only my mother and I were in this city. But because many cities were being bombed, my mother decided to leave the city to my father's hometown in the farm country, about 40km to the north of the city. But you see, that was good for her. She could survive. And I was left alone in this city. That springtime, I graduated from middle school and I entered the Hiroshima Technical College, but still no schooling and we had to continue working. But from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, somehow our teacher told us, "You guys come to school for brief schooling. We will start schooling again." And usually I was lazy and did not like to study so much. But at that time we were very pleased. "Hey, we can go back to school. That sounds very nice."

So we began going to school from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. Six days after that, we were bombed. That was the situation in those days. That morning, we new students went to school as usual. Our school had located here, the south side, just 2km from the hypocenter here. In those days, we were staying in a dorm near the station and we commuted to school by streetcar every morning. A man's fate is very mysterious. We were very, very lucky because our school started at 8am so we were already at school here at 8:00. Imagine, the bomb was dropped at 8:15. If our school had started at 8:30 or 9:00, we must have been in the street cars going to school, almost in the central area.

We must have been burned and killed instantly in the streetcars. How lucky we were. The first period math class had already started in our classroom, which was located on the second floor of a two-story wooden building. I think there were over 70 boys in the room and I was seated in the extreme front row, south side corner here. Again, I was very, very lucky. My seat was very nice. Imagine, which is closer to the hypocenter, north side, south side, even in the same classroom, my position was much better. Later, I learned that. After the bombing, I didn't go back to the same school again and I don't know much about my classmates or what happened to them. Maybe some were dead I guess but I don't know. Recently I heard one case about a guy who was sitting in the north side in our classroom. This guy could survive after all but he had a very hard time after that. I hear that he was badly burned and wounded and he became unconscious. Later, he was taken out. But until he could recover, he had a hard time for many years. So the north side, south side, even in the same classroom, my position was very nice. Later I learned that.

15 minutes after the class started, at 8:15, I happened to see outside the window. It was a very, very beautiful sunny day and blue skies. Very beautiful. When I looked up, I could see two American B-29 bombers flying very high in the air, over 10 thousand meters high. I hear that there must have been three or four planes, but I remember two of them. One might have already dropped the bomb and left. I have no idea. I just felt, "Oh, they are coming again." In those days, Japan didn't have any more fighter planes to attack them anymore. No Japanese planes went up and even antiaircraft guns, they can never reach so high. So American planes were flying at any time at their will so we didn't pay much attention either. There were only two of them. They are doing some routine work or something like that. I just felt, "Beautiful planes shining in the morning sun. Silver white planes." But the next moment when I turned my eyes back to the textbook – that was the moment of the explosion. A very strong flash and shockwave of explosion, and heatwave. These things attacked me at the same moment. A strong flash, shockwave, and heatwave.

At a 2km position and inside the building, the heat must have been much lower than that of the center. I hear that the heat in the center, it was over 4 thousand degrees centigrade. I hear that I would melt at 1,500 degrees. Can you imagine any living being exposed to such strong heat for one or two seconds? People in the streets in the central area must have been burned and killed instantly. I hear there was a man sitting on the step stone of the entrance of a bank near the center. Now this guy's shadow was printed on the step stone for many years. What strong heat. Very horrible. I just can't imagine.

At a 2km position, the heat must have been much lower, but still I felt hot. But at that moment, everything was decided to each of all the citizens in Hiroshima. How far from the hypocenter, in the streets, outside the building, or inside, or even in the shadows or not, that decided, at that moment, everything. Real horrible. But at that moment, I realized it was a bombing and I covered my ears and eyes and jumped under the desk. Then a huge noise followed. Hundreds of thunders, a big, big noise. And after the big noise, it became so quiet. Imagine, there were many boys but no one screamed. No voice, no sound, and it became so dark. Real pitch black, almost like midnight. Real miserable, I was just crawling around on the floor like I was blind and I was bleeding from head to feet. Shirts had been torn, real miserable, real hell. I felt, "Oh I am dying, I will be killed." And of course I prayed, "Help me mother" or "Help me Buddha." You say, "Help me God." Same thing.

How long was I crawling around on the floor? One minute or two minutes? Soon a little light came in and I could understand that the whole structure of the roof or ceiling fell on our heads. But somehow around me, fortunately the floor was rather tough and my position was very close to the door. Somehow, I could sneak out and the staircase was still okay. How lucky.

Somehow I could sneak out of the building. Everyone at that time, one bomb was dropped here beside me. I was such an unlucky guy in the world. In those days we didn't have any idea about such a big bomb and everyone believed one bomb was dropped here beside me. I also believed the enemy dropped a bomb beside me and I was such an unlucky guy in the world. But when I could get out of the building, I was so shocked to see all the school buildings had been destroyed badly and there were so many wounded students around there. No one was in ordinary shape. Hundreds of them badly wounded or broken bones, bleeding, and lying or sitting on the grass in the playground. So I was confused. "Why are they so badly burned?" Only two bombers. "What did they do?" No idea, see.

But at that time I realized my injury was not so serious. Again, how lucky I was. I was bleeding a lot but they were all caused by a lot of small cuts and by the small pieces of window pane or small debris, but my bones were okay and I could walk. How lucky my injury was not so serious. At that time one of my friends asked me for help. He had a big cut on his head. I thought of taking him to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. That hospital, even today, the picture is located here, about 200 meters to the north of our school. So I took him and both of us walked out of the school gate. Now everyone,

again we were shocked to see all the houses around there had been destroyed badly and debris scattered around there. There was a streetcar road around our school, but already the streetcars had stopped here and there, and electric poles leaned or had fallen down, wires dangling. And already the whole city was on fire. Fires had started everywhere and the street was full of smoke whirling. I couldn't understand what happened.

Above all, in the smoke, I had to see hundreds of hundreds of people were coming and walking in a long line from the central area, this way. They were the people bombed in the central area. These people intended to evacuate out of the city to every direction. That is why we had to witness those people coming this war. These people were just miserable. Unbelievable. Their hair had stood up straight like a small mountain. Some had lost hair, burned and gone. Many of them were so badly burned from head to feet. Their skin was charcoal grey and some of them almost peeling from their faces and necks, breasts, arms, so badly burned. And their clothes were torn and singed. Some were almost naked, leaving just some cloth around their waist. And some of them had swollen up like pigs. Because their skin was peeling, their skin was hanging from their chin or arms and under the peeled skin I could see some of them, red muscle under the peeled skin. These people were just walking, without exceptions, they held out their arms forward like this. Maybe because of pain I think. They were walking slowly in a long line. Exactly procession of ghosts. But on that day, all day long, wherever I went, I had to see these people. We can't count how many people were so badly burned at that moment.

I could never go into the center area. The whole city was on fire. At that moment, countless people couldn't walk anymore. They just crawled to the riverside asking for water and died beside the rivers or drowned in the rivers. That is why, for many days after that, these rivers were full of bodies. They just went up and down according to the movement of the tide. Of course the streets were piled with bodies. But I could never go into the center area. The whole city was on fire. Somehow, we got to the hospital, but you see the hospital front area was full of those wounded or burned people, lying or sitting. And even the doctors and nurses were wounded, and no help. I had to take my friend back to school again.

This guy was fortunately picked up by a rescue truck, which came from the harbor later, and he was picked up here at the foot of this small bridge. And he was sent to the harbor and later to another island and he could survive. That was all that I could witness just after the bombing. Real hell. But you can understand, at that moment, 10 thousands of

very weak and inflammable Japanese houses were destroyed in a moment and people were buried, couldn't get out. Some of them were burned and killed. Naturally, a lot of people had to run away, leaving their loved ones under the smashed houses. Imagine, parents had to give up their children under the buried houses. Otherwise, buried parents told their children, "Go away, leave me here, fire is coming." Real hell. These kinds of things happened in a moment. Real horrible bomb I think. After that, I should have worked for rescue work, but in those days I was just a 16 year old, selfish young boy, and I wanted to leave the city as soon as possible. I decided to leave Hiroshima and started walking. I crossed this bridge. I could see both sides of the river on fire and the whole city was on fire. A big cloud of smoke was covering the whole city and I could feel, "Hiroshima is dying and maybe the Americans invented such a big bomb. It may be difficult to win this war." But this young boy didn't believe in surrender either. I just walked and walked this way, back to the dorm. The dorm had been smashed and Hiroshima station was on fire. The trains had already stopped so I decided to walk all the way, one or two more stations, over 10 km. But all the way, I had to see these people. Real hell.

In the evening, I could get on the rescue train, and two or three more stations, got off the train, and started walking, walking, walking. At almost midnight, I reached my mother's home and my long day was over. But you see, again, I was very, very lucky, having a place to go back home. On the contrary, a lot of people bombed here didn't have places to go. They just went to the elementary schools in the suburbs, or shrines, or temples, or town halls. These places were full of those casualties that night and they just asked for water, water, water in the dark. Before the next morning came, a lot of them died. Real sad. In my case, I was very lucky, again. I had a place to go back home.

Of course my mother was so pleased to see me. "You were alive." She said they saw the mushroom cloud among the mountains while she was working in the rice paddies. Rumors spread out that Hiroshima was bombed by a big bomb and people died. She had believed I was dead so she was very pleased to see me. As for me, from the next day, I became very ill because of high fever and diarrhea. These days, I think it might have been the immediate aftereffect by radiation because I was here at a 2km position must have been exposed to a lot of radiation here. But I left the city very soon after that and I didn't stay here long. That was good for me. At that time, I didn't know. But you see, I left the city very soon and didn't stay here long. That was good and I could recover after one week or 10 days.

Since then, until today, I have become ill from time to time, but I am still alive anyway. I should say, "Thank Buddha." But even today, I still have some small cancer. But in my case, some medicine does not work for me. One of these days, I asked my doctor why the medicine doesn't work for me. He said, "You have a problem about your blood. The number of white cells is extremely low." This is a very common phenomenon among us survivors I think, a very low number of white blood cells. Because of that, some medicine does not work for me. Again I asked my doctor, "Do you think this is the influence of the A-bomb?" And he said, "I don't know. So many things are still unknown about A-bombs." It was a very hot season and people's burns and wounds festered very soon. And even infested maggots and people had a very hard time. More and more people died in pain.

Even healthy people, seemingly no injury or no burns, quite alright, these people suddenly became ill with a lot of strange symptoms, like sudden high fevers or suddenly losing hair, or bleeding from gums, or suddenly many spots on their bodies, or diarrhea. Many strange symptoms and then died. In those days, people didn't have good knowledge about radiation. Doctors didn't know either. People just named it A-bomb diseases, that's all. And people died one by one in pain. As you see, in that year, 1945, over 140 thousand citizens died. And even many, many years after the bombing, still people became ill suddenly and died. As you know, a couple of years later, leukemia or many kinds of cancers started among us survivors.

In many ways, we survivors were bothered. For instance, pregnant ladies gave birth to mentally or physically retarded babies. People named them A-bomb babies. Did you know that? We survivors had a very hard time about a kind of discrimination to survivors. Ordinary people were afraid of the genetic problem to the next generation of the survivors, especially women had a problem about their wedding, naturally. And some ladies couldn't get married. A merciless rumor, very bad. In many ways, survivors were to have very difficult times. Some of you might have heard about black rain. After the explosion of the A-bomb, a great deal of ash went high, up and up. One or two hours after the bombing, it became black rain which contained the black ash; fell. Mainly black rain fell in the west suburbs, I think, in a very wide area. One or two hours after the bombing and people got the black rain. Again, fortunately, I went to the east and I didn't get it. But those people who had the black rain, even today some of them have some problems about their health. Maybe the influence of radiation, things like that.

As you see, I was one of the most fortunate survivors because of many reasons. As you see, I am still alive anyway and in my family, I was the only one who suffered from the A-bomb. But you see, in this city, a great many people lost their loved ones and their families. For instance, one of my friends lost six people in his family. His house was a little to the east from the hypocenter here. This guy was working in a factory in the suburbs that morning and he was alright. But he couldn't come home on that day of course. A couple of days after the bombing, he came back home, the place where his home was, only to find six bones of his parents, brother, sister, and even grandmother. He lost all of his family. This guy doesn't want to talk about the bombing even today. I can't understand him. But you see, we have a great many of these families even today in this city. In many ways, we have been bothered by the A-bombing even today.

Three days after Hiroshima, Nagasaki was bombed and our government told us Nagasaki was bombed by another new type of bomb and we got some damage. Some damage? It must have been huge damage. One week after that, Japan surrendered and the war was over and we were told there was the atomic bomb. As for me, I was going to be an engineer. That is why I was in the technical college. Somehow, I had to change my course and I became a schoolteacher. Three years after that, I came back to the city and I started teaching in junior high schools. I taught for over 40 years in this city and retired. But because I am still alive, I am doing this kind of thing. Perhaps Buddha tells me, "You must be alive and tell more people what you experienced." Maybe. But that is almost all I have to tell you.

Finally, I hope that you can understand what cruel and inhuman weapon the A-bomb was. We must learn from the past and keep in mind the lessons which the A-bomb taught us so that we will never make the same mistake again. We, the citizens of Hiroshima, just want more and more people of the world to know the horrible reality of the A-bomb and to learn that this bomb must never be used on any people at any place in the world again. I know that all of you are doing a great effort for the peace of the world, and I ask you further dedication to abolish all the nukes from this world. I also ask all of you to tell your people what you have learned here in Hiroshima and our sincere appeal to oppose all the nukes in the world when you return to your homes. May the peace of the world come sooner and no more Hiroshimas. Thank you.

## MC

Thank you very much Mr. Matsushima. Only the A-bomb survivors are able to testify. Thank you indeed very much. Your words have touched deeply on my heart. Now we

have a few minutes for questions and answers. Do you have any questions to Mr. Matsushima to ask? Since he is one of the A-bomb survivors, *hibakusha*, I am sure there were a lot of lessons he was able to learn. Any questions? Please wait for the microphone.

**Mr. Aaron Tovish, Executive Advisor, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation;**  
**International Director, International Campaign Secretariat, Mayors for Peace**  
**2020 Vision Campaign**

I am wondering about the great fire that came after the attack. When you were walking away from the city, you could look back and see this huge column of smoke rising into the sky. Could you tell us more about that?

**Mr. Matsushima**

As I told you, when I crossed the bridge, I could see both sides of the river. The whole city was on fire. But that is all I could witness. When I was walking on the streetcar road, of course I tried to look at the central area but I couldn't see; just flames and great smoke.

**Ms. Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Advisor, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation;**  
**Mayors for Peace North American Coordinator, USA**

Mr. Matsushima, I am Jacqi Cabasso, I had the pleasure a few years ago – or the honor. It wasn't really a pleasure – of touring the US nuclear weapons laboratory in Livermore, California, with you. It was a very emotionally difficult experience for both of us, and since it was very recent and this laboratory is continuing to develop nuclear weapons, I wonder if you could share some of your recollections from what the laboratory people said to you that day and what the experience was like for you?

**Mr. Matsushima**

As one of the citizens of Hiroshima, I am not an active activist of things like that. I can't refer to the political problems, as you know, how to control nukes in the world is a very difficult problem I think. As you know, there are still some leaders and countries which want to rely on nukes. Even big countries like the United States or Russia, they want to rely on nuclear deterrents or such an idea. Such a political problem is very difficult to me. Fortunately, I understand President Obama of your country has a positive attitude to abolish nukes from this world. I just expect your country will be the leading country about this problem. That's all.

**MC**

Persons who have any questions, please wait for the microphone.

**Ms. Jasminka Bajlo, Mayor's Counselor of Biograd na Moru, Croatia**

Greetings to you all, and Good day to you and it was very nice listening to you. I am from Croatia and I have no questions to ask, I just wanted to give you my impression. We are having an A-bomb exhibition in the capital city in September and then the exhibition is going to be transferred to Biograd na Moru, which I represent. Because I am interpreter/translator, I do many things, so I translated all the posters of the A-bomb exhibition that are going to be exhibited in Zagreb, which was very interesting. I learned a lot. But I can say that a much better influence and a much better impression and a much more heartbreaking impression is when the *hibakusha* come and when they speak about their experiences like you spoke now. I listened to *hibakusha* also in Manchester and I think that that leaves a much, much deeper impression than any A-bomb exhibition. That's all.

**Mr. Matsushima**

Thank you very much. I am very glad to hear that. Thank you.

**MC**

Any other questions or comments or messages to Mr. Matsushima?

**Mr. Khder Kareem, Mayor of Halabja, Kurdistan, Iraq**

What is your best suggestion for no more Nagasaki, no more Hiroshima? And as the Kurdish nation experienced chemical attacks on Halabja, such things trying to be in Syria, from your experience, what is your best and simple suggestion for no more nukes? Thank you very much.

**Mr. Matsushima**

As you see, I am not a politician or something like that. What I can do as one of the citizens of Hiroshima is just trying to tell more people of the world to tell the horrible reality of nukes and ask people to have common public opinion to oppose all nukes. Perhaps if people have very strong public opinion to oppose nukes, their government can't have nukes – I hope. That is all I can do. Sorry, I am not a politician. I don't have a good idea. It is a very difficult problem.

**Mr. Kareem**

Thank you very much.

**MC**

Thank you very much. Yes, please wait for a microphone. The person in the front row, please.

**Mr. Yasuyoshi Komizo, Chairperson of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, Japan**

I will speak in Japanese. Thank you very much for your testimony. I think I had the occasion to listen to your testimony several times before. What I would like to emphasize here today is the fact that there was not any more use of nuclear weapons is dedicated to the efforts by *hibakusha* saying, “No more Hiroshima and no more Nagasaki.” You have been making very best efforts to communicate your experiences and teaching the young generations. Those strong feelings of *hibakusha*. We should never forget about it. We try to keep it in a deeper place of the heart. We need to expand the voices of the citizens in search for peace and also for the new young generations, they have to be serious to put it into practice to realize the abolition of the nuclear weapons. I shall make my commitment. As one of the listeners, I would like to share my commitment together with you. Thank you indeed very much for your encouraging words. I would like to ask for your support. Lots of luck, thank you very much.

**MC**

Please wait for the microphone to come to you.

**Mr. Thomas Mathew, 2020 Vision Campaigner, India**

I have had the privilege to invite seven *hibakusha* to India for the Peace Tour since 1990. I heard your story. It is very touching. When you changed your profession as a teacher, how do you feel about the new generation thinking about nuclear bombs or nuclear deterrent? Working with a university in Tokyo, I know [inaudible] can send when we talk about a nuclear world, especially in India and Pakistan, we are always trying to make more sophisticated weapons. And we are very concerned. So when we talk about the past about what happened in Hiroshima. That is a lesson for the whole world. Many students, they said they had never been in Hiroshima. They are not so interested to learn. What do you think? Because from the other side of the world, we are thinking, a message from Hiroshima like you? The new generation is so important for the world to learn how deterrent was Hiroshima and the nuclear bomb. Thank you.

**Mr. Matsushima**

Thank you. You have a good opinion I think. Even in the city of Hiroshima, the younger generation, unfortunately, some of them are quite careless about this problem. In other words, people forget things easily. It is a shame but even among us Japanese, who have very bad memories of the A-bomb, might have been disappear little by little. In this city, Hiroshima, we feel the necessity of peace education in elementary schools or junior high schools, and we have special programs about peace education. We tried to teach younger generations about the A-bomb and the horror of nukes. We are trying to. I am afraid there are some people who are not so curious about the problem of peace or nukes. That is very sorry but true. We have to try more and more.

**MC**

Thank you very much. Please wait for the microphone. I think we only have a minute or two. I think this question is going to be the last question. We are sorry to say that.

**Mr. Thore Vestby, Mayor of Frogn, Norway**

You said you were walking towards the Red Cross or where the Red Cross used to be with your schoolmate. But the Red Cross center was gone. Then you helped yourself. Have you known that the International Red Cross are addressing the humanitarian aspect of the nuclear blast? Can you tell us a little bit about how the rescue system was installed or if there was a rescue system after the blast in Hiroshima? Even if you were some kilometers away, you probably know a little bit about it? Thank you.

**Mr. Matsushima**

I think perhaps you are talking about some help to us survivors about our diseases or things like that from our government. You mean something like that? Immediate rescue work, of course I am interested in the Red Cross movement but I really don't know so much about this field. I am sorry.

**MC**

Sorry that we have to say this is going to be the closing of this session. This concludes the question and answer period for the representative of *hibakusha*, Mr. Matsushima. Thank you indeed for your input. And also my thanks go to Mr. Matsushima for your very impressive testimony. This concludes the A-bomb survivor testimony session.