

2018 Mayors for Peace Youth Exchange for Peace: Support Program for "HIROSHIMA and PEACE"

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Lessons From Hiroshima

Two weeks to understand one of, if not the, biggest political, social and scientific disasters of our current 'nuclear Anthropocene' only allowed me to scratch the surface of this massively compelling but also poignant issue. However, attending the Mayors for Peace Exchange and Hiroshima for Peace summer school significantly development what was my superficial understanding of Hiroshima, the nuclear bombs and Hibakusha, amongst other key issues that shape global peacebuilding today.

As well as a range of factual information surrounding the events of August 1945, I gained an understanding of the current attitudes in Japan to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and how these have shaped a national psyche of peace promotion and cross-cultural cooperation. The Hiroshima Peace Ceremony in the Peace Memorial Park illustrated how, despite occurring over a generation ago, nuclear issues are still prominent not just at a political level but also for the 'everyday' man, women or child. This pervasiveness was shown by the incredible moving testimonies by the Hibakusha who were not front-line soldiers but 'everyday' children attending schools in Hiroshima at the time. However, at the political level the continuous leadership required to abolish nuclear weapons was also clear, which is not something that is particularly visible outside of Japan. The Mayor of Hiroshima was exceptionally ardent in his efforts to amplify the message of the Hibakusha on a global stage. It was especially enlightening to learn of such strong political will backing nuclear abolition.

Another pertinent theme was cross-cultural cooperation. Not only is this the focal point of the programme, which exceptionally facilitates cross-cultural exchange amongst students from widely differing backgrounds, but this came across as a central method for success in abolishing nuclear weapons. Listening to, understanding and analyzing a range of opinions from peers from a range of countries and continents was crucial in my learning of nuclear-related issues. Learning about radiation in Nevada to the Fukushima clean-up and the Korean Hibakusha from citizens of those respective countries brought issues and policies alive. Regulations on nuclear arms has to be multilateral in order to be effective, and hence this will require a comprehensive cross-cultural understanding on a far larger scale. I learned the effectiveness of this method and its vital application for nuclear non-proliferation policymaking.

Suggestions for Future Actions

During our workshop in Hiroshima, myself and my colleagues devised a range of criteria for effective actions for raising awareness of nuclear issues and wider peacebuilding activities. I have then contextualized these strategies for my city (Manchester, UK) while drawing on previous examples of effective methods from a range of other campaigns and peacebuilding literature. The suggestions are categorized below and explain their rationale, general purpose as well as potential example activities that could achieve each goal.

Political Pressure

As mentioned above, political leadership is still fundamental to achieve policy change. Despite valid efforts of

external campaigns, policies are only changed when politicians deem so. Although public pressure methods are increasing in capacity and reach, 'realpolitik' is still the dominant driver in nuclear policy. Predominantly it is based around the notion of deterrent and mutual destruction. While this is still the national government's policy they are dependent on MPs (members of parliament) to be elected and Greater Manchester elects 27 MPs. There is a currently minority government (10 seats short of a majority) and a degree of legislative paralysis in wake of the Brexit vote and the shortcomings of the implementation of the 'Chequers Deal'. Nuclear policy debate could fill the political void and potential serve as a welcome distraction from Brexit issues. Manchester MPs votes, are crucial for the government to enact legislation and hence is valuable leverage. And after leaving the EU it would be a great opportunity to reevaluate our nuclear policy position.

I would encourage Manchester City Council and grassroots political organizations in Manchester to lobby their national MPs in order to push nuclear policy issues. This would take the form of consultations with MPs (surgeries) and public and private lobbying (petitions, targeted campaigns). This could also draw on the council's close relationship with the MPs, many of whom are from the same political party, and use council leaders to lobby MPs directly.

Raise Public Awareness and Education

Nevertheless, civil society can still play a valuable role. This would be twofold: to raise public awareness of nuclear issues and then educate individuals and groups on the history and background to these issues. With a well-informed citizenry who are not only aware of the policies but also wider contextual factors, there is more potential to influence policymakers. As UK politicians are accountable to their constituents and our electoral cycles are every four years then public pressure has huge potential. A comprehensive, world-wide civil society campaign, such as the Campaign to Ban Land Mines, could also pressurize policymakers from abroad.

Before such campaigns can be implemented it is crucial that nuclear issues are taught explicitly. Initiatives such as school outreach courses, either run by the council or NGOs, that could tie in to the wider Peacebuilding education that came off the back of the Manchester Arena attack. This could be potentially merged together. This could take the form of cultural exchange with Hiroshima, either through visits, pen-pals or other forms project work. Additionally, the Council could liaise with Manchester universities' student bodies to run seminars or workshops for students.

Regarding awareness raising campaigns, Manchester benefits from a history of activism and free speech. Hence the infrastructure is in place for running effective campaigns. The Hiroshima Peace Day in August could be expanded to be a week of activities, film screenings, Hibakusha testimonies (either by skype or another format). Moreover, rallies in Piccadilly Gardens, St Anne's Square or Albert's Square would effectively help disseminate the message of nuclear abolition.

It should be noted that neither method should be standalone. They are mutual reinforcing and should take place simultaneously. If possible there should be coordination between the political pressure and public awareness and education activities. Momentum will grow if there are sustained and multi-pronged efforts on all fronts at the same time.