

## 2019 Mayors for Peace Youth Exchange for Peace: Support Program for "HIROSHIMA and PEACE"

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I find no words to express my gratitude for all that I have learned in Hiroshima. I can say, for sure, that this experience has made me a better person, more empathetic with others, and more aware of global problems. I also realized that no matter where people are born or what language they speak, we are all one community and, together, we can build a better world!

At Hiroshima City University, I broadened my academic knowledge. The recommended readings and lectures were of fundamental importance to better understand not only the atomic bomb, but also about World War II, as well as the pre and post-war historical context, the consequences the world faces nowadays with the danger of nuclear weapons.

Among the lectures, one fact that caught my attention was the Manhattan project, which was when the construction of atomic bombs began, back in 1939. There was an alert that the Nazis were exploiting uranium and could use it for weapons. Then, the US government starts a huge project that employs more than 130,000 people, involving 4 US states and costing US\$ 2 billion (about US\$ 23 billion today). Six possible Japanese targets (Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kokura, Tokyo, Yokohama, Niigata) were selected precisely to measure the destructive power of the new weapons.

Another interesting discussion was whether atomic bombs actually saved millions of lives and ended World War II. Documents prove that the surrender of Japan was more due to the Soviet invasion of Manchuria than from the bombs, since at the time, because it was a new weapon, no one yet knew its effects, which far exceeded the time of the bombing. As such, atomic bombs were more a demonstration of US military power to the Soviets in what would be the beginning of the Cold War.

Memorable moments of the Hiroshima and Peace course were the testimonies of the Hibakushas, as well as the tour on Peace Memorial. At the museum, it is shocking to see the destruction caused by bombs, even on iron structures. But even worse is looking at the damage done to the homes, clothes and belongings of so many impacted civilians.

Impossible not to be greatly moved by the testimonies of the A-bomb survivors. A tragedy that turned the day into night, bringing a black and radioactive rain, making it even harder to find family members. Those who survived had the arduous task of rebuilding their city, their lives, while facing prejudice and distress for not knowing the aftereffects of radiation. Thanks for the honor of sharing their stories with us, as many survivors have only recently been able to talk openly about what happened. After all, everyone has taught us the power of forgiveness. That we should not blame someone else, but the circumstances of the war. And spreading this message is a way of ensuring that horror does not reoccur. At the ceremony on August 6<sup>th</sup> and in our visit to the Mayor of Hiroshima, Mr. Kazumi Matsui, emphasized the importance of young people not forgetting the horrors of the bombing. Future generations have an obligation to seek international cooperation, and, for this, we can start with small attitudes within our cities.

Currently, countries like the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea have together nearly 15,000 nuclear weapons. Of these, the first five are part of the UN Security Council. However, this does not exclude the possibility of accidentally detonating a bomb, killing thousands of civilians. Therefore, we need to struggle not only for nonproliferation, but also for the safe extinction of current nuclear weapons.

The adhesion of more Brazilian cities to Mayors for Peace and the promotion of atomic bomb awareness events are part of Santos project. In addition, annually, we remember atomic bombings with a ceremony in the city. This year, between October 4th and 6th, we will have Santos 1st Immigrant Festival, promoting a multicultural and respectful environment in which we will even have the inauguration of a tram donated by the Nagasaki government, as well as dance and taiko performances. In 2020, we will participate in the Mayors for Peace Children's Art Competition.

I believe that a concrete plan for the abolition of nuclear weapons needs to raise the awareness of every citizen for this issue. Together, we will press our mayors to commit themselves, and they will take our message to the presidents and prime ministers to sign the treaty. I pledge to continue spreading what I have learned to as many people as possible. Cultural exchange is a very useful tool as it goes beyond the issue of weapons, promoting peace. It makes people realize that, despite cultural differences, regardless of nationality, we are all human beings wanting to live in peace, happiness and harmony with nature. And then, we must elect rulers who respect our wish!

Despite the tragedy experienced, Hiroshima is today a beautiful city that exudes peace and teaches the world a lesson of overcoming it. My appreciation for the Japanese people for their generous receptivity. May we all admire and learn from them, it was a life-changing experience. I can not thank you enough, Mayors for Peace!