

Japanese Forum

The following forum brings together the opinions of Japanese institutions and associations working for disarmament. Below is a brief description of the contributors to the forum.

City of Hiroshima.

Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation (HPCF) is part of the City of Hiroshima and works in the field of education and outreach. It promotes policies for the abolition of nuclear bombs, runs the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum, and participates in national and international initiatives to spread the culture of peace.

Useful links:

<https://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/site/english/>

<https://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/hpcf/english/index.html>

Hiroshima Prefecture

Through Hiroshima Organization for Global Peace (HOPE), Hiroshima Prefecture promotes initiatives in order to realize peace initiatives toward nuclear weapons abolition, also seeking a new security policy that does not rely on nuclear deterrence

Useful links:

<https://hiroshimaforpeace.com/en/hiroshima-organization-for-global-peace/>

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

Prof. Toshiya Umehara is an expert in International Relations and his field of research concerns the communication of nuclear weapons-related content in the media. He teaches at the HPI (Hiroshima Peace Institute). He speaks in this forum in a personal capacity.

1. What does your association mainly deal with?

City of Hiroshima

We are working to realize the world without nuclear weapons in collaboration with cities around the world. Our city's activities for peace are based on the following three main pillars.

First, we promote initiatives for the abolition of nuclear weapons, such as our Promoting Peace through Welcoming Visitors program and the activities of Mayors for Peace.

Second, we raise peace awareness through events, such as those held during Culture of Peace Month to promote the Culture of Peace.

Third, we convey the realities of the atomic bombing to future generations through policies, such as managing the Peace Memorial Museum and Exhibit Facility for Atomic-Bombed Remnants.

Hiroshima Prefecture

Hiroshima Prefecture developed the "Hiroshima for Global Peace" plan in 2011. This plan addresses issues such as the process of nuclear abolition and promotion of peace during recovery. One significant recent development is the establishment of the Hiroshima Organization for Global Peace (HOPE). On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing in 2020, the prefecture announced the Hiroshima Initiative—a new proposal to enhance efforts toward peaceful, nuclear-free world. HOPE was established in March 2021 to promote Hiroshima Initiative, bringing together local governments, economic organizations, higher education institutions, international organizations, and other groups within the prefecture.

Specifically, Hiroshima Prefecture and HOPE are working toward a nuclear-free and peaceful world through three key approaches: humanity, security, and sustainability:

1. Humanitarian Approach:

We encourage global leaders in politics, business, and academia to visit Hiroshima and witness the realities of the atomic bombing. Additionally, we focus on developing the next generation of peace leaders, targeting high school, university, and graduate students, as well as young professionals, both in Japan and abroad.

2. Security Approach:

To move beyond nuclear deterrence, we collaborate with leading international research institutions to advance security policies that do not rely on nuclear weapons, thereby contributing to progress in nuclear disarmament.

3. Sustainability Approach:

We aim to integrate the goal of nuclear abolition into the post-2030 development framework, following the conclusion of the current UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This ensures the elimination of nuclear weapons becomes a shared objective for the international community.

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

As a professor at Hiroshima Peace Institute, my research topic is focused with, among many other subjects, the nuclear taboo (norms of nuclear non-use). I have examined the relationship between discourses in Japanese society regarding nuclear weapons and the acceptance of nuclear non-use taboo. On top of that, I am closely watching any kind of threats of nuclear weapons usage alluded by nuclear weapons states, for example the ongoing threats made by Russian in the context of the War in Ukraine, which also affect the world disarmament scene.

2. What steps have been taken to keep alive the memory of the attack on Japan in August 1945?

City of Hiroshima

Due to the aging of the *hibakusha*, the number of those who can speak about their experience of the atomic bombing is dwindling. As such, in 2012, our city launched the Atomic Bomb Legacy Successor program to train people to convey the experiences and will of the *hibakusha* to future generations. Moreover, since 2022, we began the *Hibakusha* Family Member Legacy Successor program to enable members of *hibakusha* families to inherit and convey a wider variety of *hibakusha* experiences.

The second one is preserving atomic-bombed buildings and trees. As the aging of the *hibakusha* continues and it becomes increasingly difficult to convey the realities of the atomic bombing from first-hand sources, the role that atomic-bombed buildings and trees play will become much more important as they speak of the reality of the atomic bombing without even saying a word.

Hiroshima Prefecture

To ensure the memory of the U.S. atomic bombings is not forgotten, we believe it is vital to engage directly with the reality of the bombings. This can be achieved through dialogue with A-bomb survivors, attending lectures about their experiences, and visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park.

It is especially important for young people—both from Japan and abroad—who visit Hiroshima to encounter the reality of the atomic bombing and pass on their reflections, experiences, and hopes for peace to future generations.

The City of Hiroshima plays a key role in preserving and sharing A-bomb accounts and testimonies, as well as managing the planning, operation, and maintenance of the Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park.

As mentioned, HOPE seeks to convey the reality of the atomic bombing to global leaders in politics, business, and academia through visits to Hiroshima. Additionally, it provides educational programs for high school, university, and graduate students, as well as young professionals, both in Japan and overseas, as part of its humanitarian approach.

3. How is the tragedy of the atomic bombing viewed by the population not involved in the bombings, outside Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

City of Hiroshima

While many cities in Japan suffered significant damage due to US bombing raids during the World War II, people were shocked about the devastations caused by the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and they also felt sympathy for the victims and survivors. At the same time, many survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki say they had faced discrimination, mainly in finding a marriage partner but also in seeking jobs. Nowadays, much of the overt discrimination has gone, but some victims remain ashamed to talk about their past.

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

If you are speaking of the strength of sense of commitment and towards these matters, I would say that there exists much higher level of dedication in Hiroshima and Nagasaki than the rest of Japan. However, the general Japanese public still do share a strong sense of aversion to nuclear weapons based on the basic understanding that the nuclear attack to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 caused great deal of humanitarian catastrophes and shall not be repeated. It is attested by the fact that, despite the deteriorating security environment in East Asia such as emergence of a nuclear North Korea and China's seemingly pacing militarization including nuclear arsenals, the majority of Japanese to this day still believe it not to wise to arm Japan with nuclear weapons.

4. In your opinion, are today's generations (those born in the 21st century) equally involved in the memory of that tragedy?

City of Hiroshima

In my personal opinion, while some young activists are devoting themselves to anti-nuclear activities, the majority of young people tend to be not interested in this issue.

In the near future, there will no longer be any hibakusha left. As we are aware that this is a pressing issue, we will carry out initiatives to pass down the hibakusha experience using digital technology, such as AI and VR, as part of our programs for the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombing.

Specifically, we are developing a Hibakusha Testimony Simulator that will allow users to virtually experience a conversation with hibakusha by making use of their actual voices and video footage.

Hiroshima Prefecture

The average age of A-bomb survivors is over 85, and their population has fallen below 110,000 (average age: 85.58 years, A-bomb survivor population: 106,825 as of March 31, 2024, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare). Given that thousands of A-bomb survivors pass away each year, there is a real concern that the current younger generation may be the last to hear firsthand accounts of the atomic bombings from survivors.

Various initiatives are being implemented to achieve this goal. Additionally, in Hiroshima City, efforts are underway to train storytellers, create virtual reality (VR) simulations of the A-bomb experience, and use digital technology to preserve and disseminate information in archives.

5. Is the rejection of war that characterised Japan after the Second World War still as strong and felt?

City of Hiroshima

The Japanese constitution, known as the pacifist Constitution, was drafted under the Allied occupation of Japan after World War II. Article 9 of the Constitution states: “The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.”

The current cabinet has tried to make an amendment to the constitution, and prime minister Ishiba has insisted that Paragraph 2 of Article 9 be deleted because it “contradicts the existence of the self-defense Force.” However, the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, which gained seats in the latest election, was strongly against revision. In addition, more than half of the Japanese public sees no need to rush to debate revisions to the Constitution in parliament.

Despite the ruling party's hope to make an amendment, the postwar Constitution has never been revised since coming into effect in 1947. I think the reasons lie not only in the high hurdle for proposing an amendment but also the strong anti-war sentiment among citizens.

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

A simple answer would be yes. In other words, we have not witnessed any significant rise of embracing of war as an instrument to resolve conflicts in Japan.

6. How did the tragedy of World War II change the traditional militarist culture in Japan?

City of Hiroshima

Japan was demilitarized after World War II. Under Allied forces, headed by the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers (SCAP), the Japanese Army was completely dismantled, and former military officers were banned from taking roles of political leadership in the new government. Article 9 of the Constitution renounces war and prohibits maintenance of the potential for war. Years after the promulgation of the Constitution, Japan was pressured by the United States to establish its own self-defense forces in 1954, due to Cold War tensions. The Japanese government made a series of interpretations of Article 9 that legally justified Japan's possession of limited defense capabilities.

In recent years, the Japanese government proposes a significant expansion of Japan's military capabilities and a major increase in military spending because of the deteriorating international and regional security environment. The City of Hiroshima, which is the first city in the world to experience an atomic bombing in the war, is carefully monitoring the current trend of Japanese defense policy.

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

Japan as a modern state that pursued offensive militarism started with the so- called Meiji restoration in 1867 and ended in 1945. In other words, it lasted 78 years. Post-WWII Japan has been quite anti-militaristic for almost 80 years. So, speaking of a tradition, I would say Japan is not militarist culture any more at all. What made that stark contrast? First, the devastation Japanese people experienced during WWII was such that the aversion to war and military matters in general

has been ingrained to the national psyche. Second, this created the socially shared ideas (norm) among Japanese public that we should avoid repeating the same kind of path of mistakes in the past. That has formed a strong national identity of Japan as a peace-loving nation with strong distaste towards military affairs in general and nuclear weapons in particular.

7. What are the most effective ways of spreading the culture of nuclear disarmament?

City of Hiroshima

At current, there are countries that want to cause war and countries that possess nuclear weapons. When it comes to national security, the idea that threats are a practical way to take away the motivation for starting wars to avoid them or prevent a further increase in the number of nuclear weapons is gaining momentum.

To pursue our ideal, namely that wars should not be fought, and nuclear weapons should be abolished, the world should declare that there will be no more wars and strive to abolish nuclear weapons that are an absolute evil.

Staff of the Hiroshima Prefecture

As mentioned above, Hiroshima Prefecture and HOPE are implementing various initiatives based on the three approaches, all with the ultimate goal of nuclear abolition.

8. To what extent do you think the current nuclear rearmament situation alters the doctrine of deterrence?

Staff of the Hiroshima Prefecture

In response to the current severe international security environment, there is a growing trend in many countries to strengthen nuclear deterrence.

It is unclear to what extent nuclear armed states will change their nuclear doctrines, but at the very least, when we examine the current situation from the perspective of nuclear weapons' role and risk reduction, we believe that the situation is deteriorating.

We must confront and acknowledge the fact that nuclear deterrence is imperfect and always carries the risk of failure. If deterrence fails and nuclear weapons are used, it would have a devastating impact on life and the environment on Earth, potentially leading to the extinction of all life.

The only way to eliminate the risk of nuclear weapons use is to eliminate nuclear weapons themselves, and Hiroshima Prefecture and HOPE are working toward achieving this goal.

Prof. Toshiya Umehara

I am of course alarmed, especially with the prospects of nuclear weapons use in the Ukraine war. However, despite the repeated threats made by Putin and his regime, so far it has not materialized and one could argue that the deterrence still holds. Of course no one can prove that deterrence is correctly functioning and the current situation is not healthy nor sustainable. I would present a normative claim that the important point would be not to let Russia (or anybody else) to break the nuclear taboo in the first place, and god forbid, if they would break the norm, hold them accountable and show the resolve that it would be totally against the norm to be shared by the international community.

Acknowledgement:

Mr. Shinji Yasuda – Prefecture of Hiroshima

Mr. Tomohiko Morozumi and Mrs. Maria Gottardo