

Statement by CTBTO Executive Secretary, Tibor Tóth, on the occasion of the Commemorative Ceremony Genbaku No Hi - Atomic Bomb Memorial Day

Imagine the unimaginable. It was hot as it is on a midsummer morning in August in Japan. The skies were perfectly clear. Men and women were going to work. Children were being gathered at assembly points. The centre of town was already bustling with activities.

And then, at 8.15, a solitary bomb turns the city into a living hell on earth. The bomb created an instant inferno of thousands of degrees beneath the hypocenter. Radiation and heat waves vaporized the entire downtown. A black rain of radioactive dust fell over the city.

350,000 people were in Hiroshima on that day. 140,000 of them died instantly or afterwards. The river was full of dead bodies of people jumping into the water since their burns were unbearable.

The museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki bear witness to the memories and the lessons. No one can walk away unaffected by what you learn there. What you learn about the bombings. What you learn about the tens of thousands of human tragedies. What you learn about that war and about war.

In my first year as Executive Secretary of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization I visited Hiroshima. I attended the Peace Memorial Ceremony on 6 August 2006. I came away a different man than the one I had been when I arrived.

The survivors, the Hibakusha have played a crucial role in keeping the memories alive. They have played a crucial role in renouncing war, all war.

“Never again”, the Hibakusha say.

“Never again” was the message in 1863 when witnesses of the cruel battle of Solferino created the International Red Cross. And half a century later nations failed to listen to their message.

“Never again” was the message in 1919 when the sufferings at Ypres and so many other places and destruction of World War I led the international community to create the League of Nations to end war forever. And quarter of a century later nations again failed to listen to that message.

“Never again” was also the message in 1946 when after the Second World War the newly created United Nations adopted its first resolution which agreed on “the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”

64 years later, after the last “Never again” we cannot say that we are losing the fight. But we certainly cannot say that the fight has been won.

The responsibility to succeed lies with all nations. It lies with all of us who work on these issues – States, delegations and international organizations here in Vienna, scientists, civil society and citizens worldwide.

Over the last 50 years, we have added layer upon layer to the fabric of multilateral treaties and instruments. We were trying to build a safer and more secure world, a world without nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Nuclear-Weapon –Free Zones, the IAEA Safeguards and Additional Protocols, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty – are all part of this process.

But still, there are too many nuclear weapons in the world. There are too many countries that have them and others that want them. Today, there is also the risk that terrorists may get their hands on them. We all have to redouble our efforts to move away from the danger of nuclear annihilation.

Over 190 countries have committed themselves to a nuclear-weapon-free world, most recently at the NPT Review Conference in New York in May. Commitments are important. But what we really need is concrete action. Many treaties and legal instruments are not yet universally adopted. The onus is on each and every country to do its part and deal with its outstanding issues, regardless of what others do or don't. Countries need to lead, not to be led.

One crucial and concrete measure that should be acted on now is to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force. The Treaty bans all nuclear explosions. It prevents further nuclear weapons development. It has equal rights and obligations for everyone – nuclear-weapon State and non-nuclear weapon State alike – and it sets a new democratic standard for legal obligations as well as for verification. Over 180 countries have already committed themselves to this Treaty through their signatures. But we need a number of remaining hold-outs to also ratify the Treaty so that it can enter into force. I would like to echo the call of Secretary General Ban and call upon these countries to take concrete steps right now.

The concrete actions that all of us – States, international organizations and civil society in Vienna and elsewhere – carry out today, will matter for the world we build for tomorrow. This is the only safeguard for our children and grandchildren to live in peace and prosperity. We cannot afford to fail another time.

We need to follow in the footsteps of those giants who made a difference in the past: Nehru, the politician, Einstein, the scientist, Schweitzer, the humanist global citizen. And all the other visionary politicians, scientists and citizens who wanted to make sure that the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would never happen again.

Ever.

We have to finish what they set up to do: To achieve a world in which nuclear weapons are relegated to history.

Where “Never again” after so many failures is really “Never again”.

Thank you.