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HIBAKUSHA'S CALL: JAPAN AND THE TPNW

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This year marks the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As the only country to have suffered nuclear atrocity in war and as the home of atomic bombing survivors, or *hibakusha*, who continue to bear witness to the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, Japan is expected to play a leading role in preventing the growing threat of nuclear war and achieving a nuclear-free world. As a key initiative, Japanese civil society, led by A-bomb survivors, has strongly urged the Japanese government to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) or at least become an observer state. Although the government claimed to have seriously considered this possibility, Japan was absent from the Third Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW held at UN Headquarters earlier this month.

The government's decision not to even participate as an observer has generated strong criticism from the Japanese public, including *hibakusha*. Although Japan's foreign minister explained the reasons for this decision, the logic was widely regarded as unconvincing.

First, the government argues that the security environment surrounding Japan is extremely severe; however, this is precisely why it is necessary to ease tensions and promote nuclear disarmament. The attitude of Japan in turning its back on the TPNW will instead encourage nuclear arms proliferation by other nations and worsen the situation.

Second, the government emphasises the growing division between nuclear-weapon states (NWS) and non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS); however, it is fair to say that it is the NWS that are creating this division, and diplomacy focused solely on their side

can never resolve it. In particular, Japan, as the only country to have experienced nuclear war, can play an essential role in easing confrontation by bridging the gap between the NWS and NNWS through participation in the TPNW.

Third, the government argues that the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the most appropriate venue for discussion; however, the NPT regime has existed for more than 50 years without delivering tangible results for a nuclear-free world, mostly because the NWS have failed to implement their obligation under the NPT to negotiate nuclear disarmament. There is absolutely no guarantee that the NWS will take concrete steps toward the abolition of nuclear weapons in such a process. There is no justification for Japan to remain with a regime that has proven ineffective.

Fourth, the government suggests that even taking observer status may send the wrong message to concerned states and affect Japan's security. However, it is clear that participating in the conference does not directly affect Japan's security. By this logic, Japan should refrain from any action that might provoke US President Donald Trump, which would amount to irrational subjugation and a *de facto* abandonment of sovereignty. The government must sincerely examine the diplomatic efforts of Norway, Germany, and, in particular, Austria, which, despite being allied with the United States, still participate as observers or state parties.

The theory of nuclear deterrence is currently widespread; however, it is clear that nuclear dependence is increasing the risk of nuclear weapon use and failing to promote peace and security. Nuclear deterrence keeps the option of using nuclear weapons on the table, potentially leading to an endless nuclear war that would destroy humanity. The idea that nuclear deterrence ensures peace is a foolish illusion.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows that nuclear weapons do not bring wisdom or prevent war. When a NWS commits aggression, violating the UN Charter, the victim country and the international community have no choice but to confront it, all while under the threat of nuclear attack. President Trump's repeated references to territorial acquisitions demonstrate that not only Russia, but also the United States, could adopt this dangerous attitude.

The current, extremely challenging security environment has been created by nuclear states' unwillingness to respect international law and human rights, as well as their obsession with and threat of nuclear weapons. If this continues, we will once again return to an era of world wars, and possibly even nuclear war. The international community must now question this status quo and act immediately to create fundamental change.

The Third Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW adopted a declaration stating that nuclear abolition is not merely an aspiration but is absolutely necessary for the security

of the world and the survival of humanity. Japan must echo this call and send a strong message to the international community that nuclear weapons cannot coexist with humanity. By participating in the TPNW, Japan can clearly demonstrate that it will not tolerate the use of nuclear weapons and that it is committed to their abolition.

Last year, the Japanese A-bomb survivors group, Nihon Hidankyo, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their long-standing efforts to abolish all nuclear weapons, for their strong testimonies emphasising why nuclear weapons must never be used again, and for their dedication to hope and peace despite the physical pain and painful memories of their experiences. Japan must reconsider its diplomatic strategy, embrace the moral integrity of its own people, and work hand in hand with *hibakusha* to change a world that is severely jeopardised by nuclear weapons.

The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.

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ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organisation and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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