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## CEO Insight: The inspiring desire of atomic bomb survivors to educate

***The hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been speaking out against nuclear weapons for almost 70 years. Their organization Nihon Hidankyo has now been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts.***

Every year in August, when the cicadas chirp deafeningly loudly from the trees, the Japanese remember the darkest moments in their country's recent history. The first atomic bomb used in a war exploded over the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, three days later a second destroyed the city of Nagasaki. On both anniversaries, thousands of survivors gather to commemorate the more than 200,000 dead. In Hiroshima, the Peace Bell is rung.

During the more than 30 years that I have lived in Japan, I have often paused on these days and been deeply moved by the sad ceremonies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No one embodies the longing for a better and more peaceful world as convincingly as the hibakusha, as the survivors of these nuclear weapons are called. They could have simply accepted their fate. But in 1956 they organized themselves as the "[Nihon Hidankyo](#)", the "Japanese Council for the Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Victims".

Their educational reports and stories and their courageous testimonies of personal experiences and suffering have inspired many people to take a stand against nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence and for the peaceful coexistence of nations. Therefore, I would like to take the awarding of the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize to Nihon Hidankyo as an opportunity to write in this column not about real estate, but about this movement and its great current significance.

Nihon Hidankyo wanted to fight the social stigmatization of the hibakusha. In the 1950s, many Japanese avoided the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki out of medical ignorance. They were afraid of contracting radiation sickness. However, Nihon Hidankyo also pursued the political goal of abolishing all nuclear weapons. In their "[Message to the World](#)," the founders affirm: "Humanity must never again inflict or suffer the sacrifices and agonies that we have experienced. This is the only wish we have as long as we live."

For reasons of age, their voices of warning have become fewer and quieter. The number of hibakusha has shrunk to 114,000. Today, Nihon Hidankyo is led by people who are over 80 years old. Now, quite rightly, the Nobel Peace Prize is once again putting the organization in the spotlight. The Norwegian Nobel Committee honored Nihon Hidankyo "for their efforts towards a world without nuclear weapons and for providing testimony that has documented that nuclear weapons must never be used again".

According to the committee, these Japanese witnesses have helped to create and consolidate broad opposition to nuclear weapons around the world with their personal stories. "The Hibakusha help us to describe the indescribable, to think the unthinkable, and to somehow grasp the incomprehensible pain and suffering caused by nuclear weapons," the [award statement](#) said.

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One such educator was Sunao Tsuboi, a former co-chair of Nihon Hidankyo. He suffered such severe burns in the explosion over Hiroshima that part of his ear fell off. He remained unconscious for 40 days. After that, he was so weak and scarred that he first had to practice crawling on the floor. “They wanted to kill us, there is no doubt about that,” [said Tsuboi in 2013](#). As a teacher at a middle school, he tried so hard to educate his students about the devastating effects of nuclear weapons that they gave him the nickname “Pikadon Sensei,” a combination of the Japanese onomatopoeia for “thunderclap” used to describe the bomb and the word for “teacher.” But when Barack Obama became the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima in 2016, Tsuboi held his hand for a long time, laughed with him, and told him through an interpreter that he (Obama) would be remembered for listening to the hibakusha.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Japan's Hibakusha is not the first to recognize efforts to abolish nuclear weapons. In 1995, Joseph Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs were honored. In 2017, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), an international alliance of non-governmental organizations for a nuclear weapons convention, received the prize.

But this time, the occasion for the award ceremony is more urgent. “It is quite clear that the threat of using nuclear weapons puts pressure on the taboo of using nuclear weapons,” said committee chairman Jørgen Watne Frydnes in Oslo when asked whether Russia's nuclear weapons rhetoric during its invasion of Ukraine had influenced this year's decision. It is therefore alarming how the threat of the use of the atomic bomb is undermining this norm.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the threatening escalation of the Middle East conflict, and the nuclear armament of North Korea and Iran, the next military use of atomic weapons is becoming more and more likely, 79 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The survivors of the atomic bombings emphasize how foolish, inhumane, and irresponsible such an attack would be. The decades of tireless, uncompromising work by Nihon Hidankyo is the core and mainstay of the global nuclear disarmament movement. The Nobel Foundation has reminded the world of this with the Peace Prize for the Japanese hibakusha.

“One day, the Hibakusha will no longer be among us as witnesses to history,” the Nobel Committee wrote. “But with a strong culture of remembrance and continued commitment, new generations in Japan are carrying forward the experience and the message of the witnesses. They are inspiring and educating people around the world. In this way they are helping to maintain the nuclear taboo – a precondition of a peaceful future for humanity.”

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