Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has broken a key rule that has historically underpinned the international system – nuclear powers must not threaten non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons. This has led to scrutiny of whether we should retain the conventional concept that nuclear threats and deterrents can maintain international order, or whether there is a need for a different policy. As we consider such a complex challenge, we reflect on the 78th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, respectively, killing between 150,000 and 250,000 people, most of whom were civilians, including women and children. Not only did the nuclear weapons immediately induce bloodshed, they also caused long-term health problems and discrimination of Hibakusha — the people affected by exposure to the nuclear weapons— along with their second- and third-generation descendants. The bombing has been described as the most atrocious act of humankind.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki have collected testimonies of Hibakusha and passed them on to future generations to serve as stark reminders of the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons. The following statements of struggles and aspirations by Hibakusha are quoted from those testimonies:

- My face felt like it was burning, so when I touched it with my hand, I was surprised to find that the skin peeled off and stuck to my palm.
- My mother’s throat had been slit by a shard of glass, revealing the bones inside, and my younger sister was bleeding from the abdomen.
- “Did you get a haircut?” “My hair fell out.” My friend smiled with a strange red inside his mouth and said, “I can’t stop the bleeding.”
- The beautiful lady next door had one of her eyes protruded and dropped over her cheek, and her nose seemed to have collapsed, making her look like a different person.
- I burned my father, mother, sister and brother with my own hands. The human bodies were difficult to burn with pieces of wood, and only a few bones could be picked up, and the rest was buried in the soil.
- For the sake of many Hibakusha, and for the sake of no more victims, nuclear weapons must be abolished from the earth.
- I earnestly and sincerely hope that we will be the last atomic bomb victims of humankind.
This year's G7 Summit was held in Hiroshima. After visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, which displays photographs and testimonies of the tragedy, the leaders adopted the G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament. With this, we hoped that in the face of Russia's outrage, leaders would make the bold decision to urgently take an alternative course of action. However, the Vision simply affirms nuclear deterrence and confirms the existing framework of nuclear threats, instability and risks centred on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), without mentioning the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) at all.

Those who left the messages above barely survived the tragic nuclear attacks on 6th or 9th August 1945; most ended their lives shortly after. Listening to the voices of Hibakusha may be extremely difficult and overwhelming, but it is our duty to empathise with their thoughts and to act upon them.

The second meeting of state parties to the TPNW will be held in November this year. Although considered a crucial platform for both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon state parties to discuss nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy, the 10th Review Conference of the NPT, concluded in August 2022 without reaching an agreement on the final document. None of the nuclear weapon states has ratified the TPNW and some of them suggest that the TPNW would cause further division between states with and without nuclear weapons, and weaken the effect of the NPT.

The International Trade Union Confederation - Asia Pacific reaffirms its position that the only way to deter nuclear war is to prohibit the production, possession and use of nuclear weapons. It is imperative for the international community to strengthen its disarmament efforts with the NPT and the TPNW working in unison and create a truly effective policy towards a world free from nuclear weapons as soon as possible.

SHOYA YOSHIDA
GENERAL SECRETARY
ITUC-ASIA PACIFIC