My visit to Boston rekindles some sense of kinship within me. In the late 1970s and early 80s both Boston and Toronto, where I live, were struggling to get disarmament education and advocacy work started in schools, universities, churches, professional organizations, as so on. I remember in these days one of your organizations, Educators for Social Responsibility, had done a superb job of producing a new curriculum for disarmament education, and that our Toronto School Board benefitted from it greatly.

Then, of course, the birth of the IPPNW in the early 80s was a huge blessing for the entire global movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Dr. Lowan's and his colleagues' study of the effects of a nuclear bomb detonated on the Boston area shocked the world with the blunt message that there would be no meaningful medical response to a nuclear attack. Prevention of nuclear war would be the only realistic means of avoiding the massive loss of life. The evidence based analysis of nuclear weapons issues, professional authority and credibility, and tireless and persistent commitment of IPPNW provided powerful leadership around the world.

I was invited to attend the IPPNW Congress held in Budapest in 1985, and met several earlier leaders of IPPNW such as Bernard Lowan, Eric Chivian, Harris Peck and so forth. Later that year IPPNW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. During the garden party in the Imperial Garden hosted by the Hungarian group I met Dr. Lowan for the first time. Shaking our hands, he said he had already met me in Canada on CBC TV. He said he liked the program so much he telephoned CBC to enquire about getting the film. He certainly knew how to make a nervous stranger feel comfortable among the doctors.

Tonight, I am invited to share my thoughts and my story of survival in the Hiroshima bombing. What will follow are selected sections of the Nobel Lecture which I jointly delivered in December 2017.

I speak as a member of the family of hibakusha – those of us who, by some miraculous chance, survived the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For more than seven decades, we have worked for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

We have stood in solidarity with those harmed by the production and testing of nuclear weapons around the world.

People from places with long-forgotten names, like Moruroa, Ekker, Semipalatinski, Maralinga, Bikini.

People whose lands and seas were contaminated, whose bodies were experimented upon, whose cultures were forever disrupted.
We were not content to be victims.

We refused to wait for an immediate fiery end or the slow poisoning of our world.

We refused to sit idly in terror as the so-called great powers took us past nuclear dusk and brought us recklessly close to nuclear midnight.

We rose up. We shared our stories of survival.

We said: humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.

Today, I want you to feel in this hall the presence of all those who perished in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I want you to feel, above and around us, a great cloud of a quarter-million souls.

Each person had a name. Each person was loved by someone.

Let us ensure that their deaths were not in vain.

I was just 13 years old when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb, on my city Hiroshima.

I still vividly remember that morning.

At 8:15 AM, I saw a blinding bluish-white flash from the window.

I remember having the sensation of floating in the air.

As I regained consciousness in the silence and darkness, I found myself pinned by the collapsed building.

I began to hear my classmates’ faint cries: “Mother, help me”, “God, help me”.

Then, suddenly, I felt hands touching my left shoulder, and heard a man saying, “Don’t give up! Keep pushing! I am trying to free you. See the light coming through that opening? Crawl towards it as quickly as you can.”

As I crawled out, the ruins were on fire.

Most of my classmates in that building were burned to death, alive.

I saw all around me utter, unimaginable devastation.

Processions of ghostly figures shuffled by.
Grotesquely wounded people, they were bleeding, burnt, blackened and swollen.

Parts of their bodies were missing. Flesh and skin hung from their bones.

Some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands.

Some with their bellies burst open, their intestines hanging out.

The foul stench of burnt human flesh filled the air.

Thus, with one bomb my beloved city disappeared.

Most of its residents were civilians who were incinerated, vaporized, carbonized – among them, members of my own family and 351 of my schoolmates.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, many thousands more would die, often in random and mysterious ways, from the delayed effects of radiation.

Still to this day, radiation is killing survivors.

Through our agony and the sheer struggle to survive, and to rebuild our lives from the ashes, we hibakusha became convinced that we must warn the world about these horrific weapons.

Time and again, we shared our testimonies.

But still some refused to see Hiroshima and Nagasaki as atrocities – as war crimes.

They accepted the propaganda that these were “good bombs” that had ended a just war.

It was this myth that led to the disastrous nuclear arms race – a race that continues to this day.

Nine nations still threaten to incinerate entire cities, to destroy life on earth, to make our beautiful world uninhabitable for future generations.

The development of nuclear weapons signifies not a country’s elevation to greatness, but its descent to the darkest depths of depravity.

These weapons are not a necessary evil; they are the ultimate evil.

On the seventh of July of 2017, I was overwhelmed with joy when a great majority of the world’s nations voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Having witnessed humanity at its worst, I witnessed, that day, humanity at its best.

We hibakusha had been waiting for the ban for seventy-two years.
Let it be the beginning of the end of nuclear weapons.

All responsible leaders will sign this treaty.

And history will judge harshly those who reject it.

No longer shall their abstract theories mask the genocidal reality of their practices.

No longer shall “deterrence” be viewed as anything but a deterrent to disarmament.

No longer shall we live under a mushroom cloud of fear.

To the officials of nuclear-armed nations – and to their accomplices under the so-called “nuclear umbrella” – I say this:

Listen to our testimony. Heed our warning.

And know that your actions are consequential.

You are each an integral part of a system of violence that is endangering humankind.

Let us all be alert to the banality of evil.

To every president and prime minister of every nation of the world, I beseech you: Join this treaty; forever eradicate the threat of nuclear annihilation.

As members of the human family we each have a duty to protect the planet so please, my friends, embrace this treaty. For the sake of all children, let us chart a new course. Let us make this precious Earth free of nuclear weapons once more.

Last week at the UN, Greta Thurnberg implored, exhorted and challenged the world to face the urgency of climate change, and launched a world-wide climate strike to demonstrate the determination of the younger generation to inherit a world free of increasing threats.

All of humanity face two existential threats — climate chaos and nuclear war by accident or design. As young Greta said “the eyes of all future generations are upon us.”

Let us use this vision of future generations to inspire us, to re-double our efforts to ensure that they are born into a world worthy of their rightful inheritance.