75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The memory of a photo of a dehumanized humanity and the quest for a world free of nuclear weapons.

By Candelaria López

Photo credit: ICAN

Between August 6th and 9th of each year, the victims of the nuclear bombs from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Hibakusha, call on the entire community to take a stand against nuclear weapons. This 75th Anniversary continues to move us and to show us the reasons why it is important to not only stop the proliferation but to eradicate this type of weapon. Currently, the number of nuclear weapons present in the world is more than 13,000 warheads, 13,400 to be exact. This figure represents a decrease from the beginning of 2019 when the number was an estimated 13,865\(^2\). The growing decline in warheads in an international context full of tension seems to be a beacon of hope in the search for a world free of such weapons. Nonetheless, it is alarming how nuclear-weapon countries are currently modernizing their arms. Currently, nine countries have nuclear weapons, five of them are in the UN Security Council and possess 95% while the other four who possess 5% are not even members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On August 5th, the 75th anniversary of the bombing of the city of Hiroshima, the Human Security Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (SEHLAC in Spanish) and the Center for International Policy Studies (CEPI in Spanish) of the University of Buenos Aires held a regional meeting to

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\(^1\)With the collaboration of María Pia Devoto, Paula Cortes and Denis Sanviti

commemorate this important date. The meeting included the presentation of César Jaramillo and Luciana Micha, Maria Eugenia Villarreal’s moderation, and interventions by Anna Ikeda and Masumi Matsumura.

In the meeting, the humanitarian aspects and the violation of Human Rights that these bombs imply were mentioned as well as the analysis of the aspects of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signed 50 years ago and the recent Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. The danger of the existence of these weapons today was also addressed. Finally, the impact of nuclear tests on the population and the alarming possibility of new tests was also discussed.

We know that the impacts on the populations from where the atomic bombs were dropped both in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and on the populations near nuclear testing sites are multiple. The former, causing immediate death and subsequent radiation damage to people. The impact caused by the bombs 75 years ago cannot only be reduced to the physical damage but also the psychological damage of the tragedy and horror experienced by these communities as well as the forced population displacement from nuclear testing sites.

As Luciana Micha, Director of CEPI and specialist in humanitarian aspects mentioned, we need to strengthen our memory and reactivate global awareness to understand the serious consequences of these events. The latter was not only responsible for the immediate death of 70³ thousand people, but also for another 150 thousand who died sometime later after not being able to recover from their wounds from the bomb, another 130 thousand seriously injured and an infinite number of diseases resulting from residual radiation such as cancers and birth defects. For Cesar Jaramillo, nuclear weapons have only one use: to kill and to cause catastrophic consequences and intergenerational damage.

This continues to have an impact on our society as an infinite pain and as a sign of an incalculable lack of humanity when it comes to not only the use of this type of weapon but also the process of developing and modernizing already existing ones. Although there are lines that argue that since these weapons only serve as a threat in the face of a potential conflict, that they will not be used but the existence of these weapons leaves the door open to their possible use at any moment.

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3 https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/las-armas-at%C3%B3micas-son-m%C3%A1s-poderosas-75-a%C3%B1os-despu%C3%A9s-de-hiroshima/1929842 Access 08/05/2020
The explosion of the Hiroshima atomic bomb was recorded at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945. On this wristwatch found in the ruins of the city, the small hand of the watch was scorched by the explosion, casting a shadow over itself that makes it look like a large hand. Credit: AP / JA / Yuichiro Sasaki / UN

In line with the above, the uses and developments of nuclear weapons bring with them some risks that would affect international security, in Micha's words it is a question of human security. Since 1993, studies have shown how this has not only damaged the health of populations in the places that were directly affected but also around the globe and above all as a direct impact on the environment. In Jaramillo's words, we are in a moment of constant redefinition of the criteria of threat/risk where, because of the pandemic, international security is critical. In any case, nuclear weapons present an existential and above all real risk to international security.

The meeting offered a space to learn more about the legal aspect given by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 50 years ago, serving as a precedent for the appearance of the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty in 2017. Cesar Jaramillo presented the technical issues of this treaty, its limitations, and the legal loopholes in the nuclear countries within the NPT. The specialist, Director of Project Ploughshares in Canada talked in depth about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons signed by 122 countries. The

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/202932/WHA46_30_spa.pdf?sequence=1#:~:text=Efectos%20del%20uso%20real,-15.&text=La%20detonaci%C3%B3n%20de%20una%20arma,cambios%20clim%C3%A1ticos%20mundiales%20(2). Access 08/06/2020
latter is the first globally applicable multilateral agreement that would ban all nuclear weapons. There is no precedent among treaties that contain provisions to address the humanitarian consequences related to the testing and the use of nuclear weapons. This milestone was a watershed moment in international discussions. The discussions moved from a political and technical level to one where the focus was on the horrific experiences of the victims, *hibakushas*. This was a turning point because it established the importance of the humanitarian aspect that accompanied and will continue to accompany the entire process concerning nuclear weapons. The fundamental point of the discussion now complies with human rights.

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromiko signed the NPT in Moscow on July 1, 1968, in the presence of the US and British ambassadors. The Treaty would come into force 2 years later, in 1970.

This treaty will enter into motion once fifty states have notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations that they agree to be bound by the treaty\(^5\), i.e. once fifty countries have ratified it. Four new countries have already ratified the treaty within the framework of the 75th Anniversary\(^6\). These were Ireland, Nigeria, Saint Kitts, and Nevis and, Niue, reaching 44 ratifications and coming closer to a total ban on these nuclear weapons.

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\(^6\) This article was development between 08/06/2020 to 08/09/2020
The current context in which the United States Congress approved 10 million dollars for the development of nuclear tests was also discussed. This is a clear step backward for the United States who haven’t carried out these tests in 30 years. The news quickly brought criticism from those directly affected by these tests, for example, the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands. This reality should prompt us more than ever towards determined activism where we continue to pressure for the signatures of all 50 states to eradicate the existence of these weapons.

Licorne test was carried out in 1971 in French Polynesia. Credit: Collection of photographs from the TPCEN

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7 https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/75-years-after-trinity-the-human-cost-of-nuclear-tests/ Access 08/05/2020
Now, there is a global arms race of states, and the hunt for more lethal weapons leads to the modernization of existing nuclear arms and the emergence of new ones as well as their development by states that are not members of the NPT. For this reason, the states that possess them to spend an infinite amount of monetary and human resources to make these weapons even more devastating than previous experiences. Modern nuclear weapons are at least 3,553 percentage points more powerful and destructive than the *Little Boy* bomb dropped on Hiroshima. With the use of one of these weapons, international security would be fragmented; the social, humanitarian, economic, and even environmental costs would be the highest imaginable. The damage would be irreparable, breaking the whole of humanity once again. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the development of research, science, and technology for mass construction in pursuit of global and public progress rather than for instruments of mass destruction.

On the left, the radius of action that the 15-kiloton Hiroshima bomb would have over Madrid. On the right, a 90 kiloton bomb like the one the North Korean regime claims to have tested. Photo Credit: Verme El Pais

Following the discussions about the Ban Treaty, the place of the victim was vindicated and is now considered a central issue among the causes against nuclear weapons. This is reflected in the commemoration every year where the *hibakushas*, survivors of the bomb and symbols of the peace’s construction, take a leading role and demand awareness from the states and society of the dangers of the existence of this type of weapon. Those who lived through the pain firsthand not only use their

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8 Based on the percentage figure provided by SIPRI data showing how new nuclear weapons have 475 kilotons, compared to the estimated 12-13 kilo tons of little boy.
https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/las-armas-at%C3%B3micas-son-m%C3%A1s-poderosas-75-a%C3%B1os-despu%C3%A9s-de-hiroshima/1929842 Access 08/06/2020
experiences in their fight against nuclear weapons but they also rely on multidisciplinary resources from ethics, humanity, among others. The testimonies that are received each August bring back to light the horror suffered from the atomic bombs and the nuclear tests. The survivors have been figures who not only are part of but also inspire activism in the quest for a world free of nuclear weapons.

The ICAN campaign, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, calls everyone to be responsible. Society, as Cesar Jaramillo, Luciana Micha, and Maria Eugenia Villarreal agree on, has in its hands the possibility of changing the fate of humanity in regards to these weapons. Peace and cooperation is the only way to achieve this task in the defense of humanity, which as Luciana Micha referred to, as one, unique and sole humanity.

Setsuko Thurlow, distinguished nuclear disarmament activist and Hibakusha (survivor) from Hiroshima She is known worldwide as a leading figure within the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, ICAN, and for giving the acceptance speech for ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. Photo credit: Fundación Telefónica

As this pandemic has shown, the way out is collective and cooperative. The progress in the international discussion and action processes reinforce this position. The commitment of participatory citizenship is fundamental to pressuring governments to sign and ratify the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty.

A picture of a dehumanized humanity comes back to mind every August and reminds us of the importance of our actions to not commit these atrocities again. In the face of an unlearned lesson from the nine nuclear-armed states, there will always be resistance to ensure that human rights and international security are respected.