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BETWEEN HELL AND REASON: HIROSHIMA DAY 2010

By Colin Archer, IPB Secretary-General

In many countries a 65th birthday is a sign that it is time to retire from normal employment - if one has not already done so. But the 65th anniversary of an event as momentous as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is no time to retire. Quite the contrary, it is time to speed up - to accelerate the worldwide work to eliminate for ever these weapons of mass destruction and terror. 'It is the simple thing, so hard to do' as Bertolt Brecht said in another context.

For the hibakusha, the survivors of this hell-on-earth, the urgency is all the greater since they are now elderly and their numbers dwindle year by year. Their commitment to nuclear abolition is exemplary. Once again the members of the IPB network salute their courage, their humanity, their determination to rid the world of these instruments of massive overkill.

Politically, the signals this year are mixed. The echoes of Obama's Prague speech in 2009, offering a fresh vision (for a US President at least) of complete nuclear disarmament, have certainly injected a tone of optimism into international debates. We rejoiced to see the vocabulary of a 'nuclear weapons convention' adopted by the NPT signatory states in their Final Declaration at this year's Review Conference. But we continue to be frustrated at the failure of the Conference on Disarmament to even begin negotiations on a fissile materials treaty in Geneva; and just this week we learned that the US Senate has shelved ratification until the autumn where it faces "an uncertain future in the midst of a hotly contested election season" (Intl. Herald Tribune, 5 Aug). This also means that prospects for US ratification of the CTBT have dimmed.

On the positive side, it is encouraging that Ban Ki-moon is attending the Hiroshima ceremonies today. His leadership and in particular his 5-point plan for nuclear disarmament is a real boost for abolition advocates everywhere. But perhaps it is even more significant that for the first time high level representatives of the US, UK and France are also expected to be present. This is not yet a sign of willingness to fully disarm, but it is a recognition of the weight of public opinion and in particular of the moral authority of the hibakusha.

Meanwhile, as always, actions and public commemorations are being held around the world, by IPB member organisations and a host of others. This is an important tradition since it helps us to keep the issue at the top of our priority lists; and it also serves to inspire and educate new generations of activists.

As we remember what happened on that summer day 65 years ago, let us remember the comments made by the future Nobel laureate Albert Camus just two days after the first of the bombings: "*Mechanized civilization has just reached the ultimate stage of barbarism. In a near future, we will have to choose between mass suicide and intelligent use of scientific conquests[...] This can no longer be simply a prayer; it must become an order which goes upward from the peoples to the governments, an order to make a definitive choice between hell and reason.*" [Combat](#) newspaper, 8 August 1945.

The International Peace Bureau is dedicated to the vision of a World Without War. We are a Nobel Peace Laureate (1910), and over the years 13 of our officers have been recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize. Our 320 member organisations in 70 countries, and individual members, form a global network which brings together expertise and campaigning experience in a common cause. Our main programme centres on *Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development*. We welcome your participation.
