

Opening Remarks

***From Hiroshima to Fukushima:
Poetry of Nuclear Survival***

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I am honoured to be participating in this praiseworthy event in the company of two such renowned artists from Japan - Ms. Sayuri Yoshinaga and Mr. Ryuichi Sakamoto - who have come to Vancouver to impart - through poetry and music – the pain and suffering of the survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and as well, the despair experienced in Japan from the catastrophic consequences of the meltdown of Fukushima nuclear power plant five years ago – the tragic loss of life, of livelihoods, of enforced evacuation, and the onset of illness.

Sayuri Yoshinaga and Ryuichi Sakamoto are here to focus attention on the immense dangers of nuclear technology and its catastrophic consequences.

Nuclear technology is the probably the most dangerous technology ever created, and was first utilized as bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki - weapons of war - though not weapons in the usual sense, but rather, *instruments of mass extinction*. Nuclear technology was later utilized for power generation.

However, because of man’s inability to control Nature and to control nuclear technology, nuclear power plants generating energy for civilian use are, demonstrably, *ticking time bombs*. Innocent citizens - men, women and children - in Japan have suffered from the calamitous consequences of this technology both in peace and in war.

I would like to express my heartfelt sorrow for the citizens of Nagasaki and Hiroshima who suffered, from what can only be called, crimes against humanity - events so catastrophic and abhorrent they should never have occurred.

I have read of the harrowing experiences of many of the survivors of these atom bombings. I have listened to stories of death of their loved ones, stories of their own survival - of unspeakable suffering and of lifelong debilitating illness. As Mr. Tadatoshi Akiba, the former Mayor of Hiroshima, says “*An atomic bombing creates a living hell on Earth where the living envy the dead.*”

We must ensure that atrocities - such as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – both violations of International Humanitarian Law - *under any circumstances* - never happen again. ¹

And I am filled with admiration for the courage and perseverance of those citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who travel the world in their on-going endeavours to have

¹ The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were in violation of the rules of International Law: of The Hague 1907 Conventions and The Hague 1922-23 Draft Rules of Air Warfare, rules which were fully subscribed to by the United States. And moreover, the bombings violated the United States own 1940 War Department Field Manual 27-10, *Rules of Land Warfare*. These laws all prohibit targeting peaceful, civilian populations
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people understand the consequences for humanity of these atom bombings – and of their efforts to have nuclear weapons - weapons of terror - eliminated and banned.

Ms. Yoshinaga and Mr. Sakamoto walk in their footsteps; and speak - not only for the ones who did not survive, or for the ones who lived and suffered - but also for the future of humankind. And it is my hope that members of each generation - in honour of those who died and of those who survived - will continue to bear witness to this catastrophic event until nuclear weapons are banned for all time, and until all nuclear power plants are confined to the graveyard.

The uranium and plutonium bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are *not static war relics of the historical past*, but rather, *transformative moments*. It was the first use of nuclear technology on human populations – the mass destruction of human beings using only one bomb. It was the creation of a new paradigm - the nuclear age - from which was born the grim reality of a prospective future for humanity – *the ability for the human species to extinguish itself*.

Whether we think about it or not, the reality is that we live with this prospect – this nightmarish future - every day of our lives.

Humanity is at great risk from a nuclear detonation. Nine countries are in possession of a total of fifteen thousand, three hundred and fifty nuclear weapons; with a total of one thousand, eight hundred, in the United States and Russia, on hair-trigger alert and targeted for immediate launch. And each of these nuclear weapons, are of a magnitude one thousand times greater than the bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Eric Schessler, investigative journalist and author of *Command and Control*, in a recent interview said that – and I quote him - “The odds of a major city, somewhere in the world, being destroyed by a nuclear weapon are probably greater today than ever before.”²

The risks are high from nuclear accidents, from accidental, mistaken, unauthorized, or intentional launch; from cyber attacks, and from theft of nuclear materials by terrorists.

The political and militarized realm in the nuclear-armed states have failed to come to terms with the nuclear menace – have refused to acknowledge the catastrophic consequences for humanity; and the moral responsibility of governments to protect their citizens. To justify possession of their weapons, the nuclear weapons states prioritize the hazardous theory of deterrence, and attempt to control nuclear proliferation, rather than to eliminate and to ban nuclear weapons. Yet, it is commonly accepted that as long as nuclear weapons exist, there will, at some point, be a nuclear detonation.

² Mark Hertsgaard, “3 Minutes Until We all Die”, *The Nation*, January 23rd, 2015

Nuclear Power also poses an unacceptable risk to the environment and to humanity. The Fukushima disaster five years ago is only one – and the most calamitous - of a series of nuclear accidents in Japan.

Fukushima continues to release radioactive material into the oceans, water tables and the atmosphere, contaminating water, soil, plants and animals; and detected in a large range of food including freshwater fish 200 miles from Fukushima; and, as well, in fifty-six percent of the fish caught in the Pacific Ocean off Japan. And its effect on human beings, and other living organisms, is already being felt.

Thyroid cancer has increased among children in the Fukushima area, and a flood of leukemia cases are expected in the near future. Other diseases – cataracts, brain, heart disease and all kinds of cancer - related to the Fukushima meltdown, are increasing all over Japan.

The meltdown of the reactors at the Fukushima plant demonstrates the dangers – which are often played-down - and just as often kept secret - of nuclear reactors.

Nuclear reactors have a lifespan of about forty years and under normal conditions are susceptible to corrosion cracks that leak radioactivity as is the case with many in Japan, in Russia, in North America and in Europe. Japan is perhaps the worst country to depend for its power on nuclear energy. It is situated in the most geologically volatile part of the world, sits on four tectonic plates, and suffers from around fifteen hundred earthquakes each year. Tremors causing even minor damage can harm the nuclear reactors and cause leakage of radioactivity.

It is my hope that Japan decommissions its remaining nuclear plants and follows the example of Germany and Italy to end its nuclear power generation programme. It is unconscionable for governments to countenance their citizens' lives lived in terror - or in the worst case - to sacrifice the lives, the health and environment of so many of its citizens.

There is a strong global movement, initiated by the governments of Norway, Mexico and Austria, and spearheaded by Austria at the United Nations, in an on-going effort to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons because of their catastrophic consequences to humanity.

Efforts should be made to bring a similar understanding to the political and industrial realm of the devastating consequences for humans of man's failure to master the nature of nuclear technology; and for governments to remember their moral responsibility to their citizens and turn to other safer forms for power generation.

It is my hope that people everywhere will listen to the urgent and important message imparted by Sayuri Yoshinaga and Ryuichi Sakamoto.

Thank you very much!