

Japan, eighty years ago

# Atomic bombing of Nagasaki

by Marlen Simeon,\* Switzerland

*(CH-S) Eighty years ago, on 6 and 9 August 1945, American atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The horror grips everyone who contemplates the consequences of these acts – the suffering is incomprehensible. It is also incomprehensible that today, the use of atomic bombs is being considered again.*

*The author of this article visited the memorial sites in Nagasaki and wrote a moving report, which she made available to "Swiss Standpoint". Her cause is part of the fight to abolish nuclear weapons led by ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) and the powerful movement of atomic bomb survivors "Nihon Hidankyo", which received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in 2017 and 2024 respectively – in keeping with Alfred Nobel's wishes.*

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On 9 August 1945, Charles Sweeney, mayor of the American Air Force, flies with orders to drop the atomic bomb on Kokura (an important location for the Japanese arms industry on the north coast of Kyushu). Poor visibility forced him to fly to Nagasaki, the second most important target. This is where the Mitsubishi weapons factory was located. At 11:02 a.m., "Fat Man" (the name of the plutonium bomb) exploded at an altitude of 500 metres. The explosion released energy equivalent to 21 kilotons of highly explosive material. The mushroom cloud rises 18 kilometres into the atmosphere.

Due to heavy cloud cover, the bomb misses its target and hits the Christian district of Urakami with its cathedral. Within a radius of one kilometre, 80 per cent of all buildings – mostly wooden houses – are destroyed. The bomb sets objects on fire over a distance of four kilometres. 73,884 people die and 74,909 are injured (estimate as of the end of December 1945).

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Those who narrowly escaped death suffered severe psychological and physical damage.

The effects of nuclear radiation caused a range of health problems such as cancer, anaemia, glaucoma, keloids (a type of connective tissue growth), genetic diseases and malformations. Many victims of the atomic bombs are still suffering today.



View from a hill overlooking the centre of destruction. (Picture ma)

## Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum was opened in April 1996 as a memorial to the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. The collection includes materials about the explosion and shocking photographs. It also illustrates the circumstances that led to the dropping of the atomic bomb, the history of the development of nuclear weapons, and efforts to achieve peace.

The two pictures below show, on the left, a mother with her child who died after ten days because it had no strength left to drink. On the right, a dead mother and child on the platform of Urakami Station. (Pictures ma)



## Takashi Nagai

Takashi Nagai was at Nagasaki University Hospital, where he was an assistant professor, when the atomic bomb exploded. Although he himself was seriously injured, he immediately devoted himself to rescuing victims and researching the effects of the atomic bomb. His wife died in the atomic bombing, but his two children survived because they were staying with their grandmother.



*Takashi Nagai lying down while writing his books. (Picture ma)*

Takashi Nagai developed leukaemia as a result of excessive radiation exposure and died in 1951 from complications of the disease.



*Small wooden hut where Takashi Nagai spent the last years of his life. (Picture ms)*

In his book "The Bells of Nagasaki", he describes the events as an eyewitness as follows:

"A force equivalent to a storm sweeping at 2,000 metres per second destroyed and pulverised every object on the earth's surface. The vacuum created at the centre of the explosion tore the debris high into the sky like a tornado and then let it crash back to the ground.

The heat generated was 9,000 degrees Celsius. It cremated every object. Bomb fragments in the form of white-hot balls rained down and started fires over a wide area. Thousands more were exposed to radioactive rays, which led to atomic sickness.

A thick cloud of dust, dirt and smoke formed after the explosion. It blocked out the sun and caused deep darkness, just like during a solar eclipse.

After about three minutes, the cloud began to dissipate as the particles it contained sank to

the ground. Parts of the sun's rays and their warmth gradually seeped through again."

The following night, enemy aircraft dropped leaflets over Nagasaki. The text read:

"TO THE JAPANESE PEOPLE:

America asks that you take immediate heed of what we say on this leaflet.

We are in possession of the most destructive explosive ever devised by man. A single one of our newly developed atomic bombs is actually the equivalent in explosive power to what 2000 of our giant B-29s can carry on a single mission. This awful fact is one for you to ponder and we solemnly assure you it is grimly accurate.

We have just begun to use this weapon against your homeland. If you still have any doubt, make inquiry as to what happened to Hiroshima when just one atomic bomb fell on that city.

Before using this bomb to destroy every resource of the military by which they are prolonging this useless war, we ask that you now petition the Emperor to end the war.

Our president has outlined for you the thirteen consequences of an honourable surrender. We urge that you accept these consequences and begin the work of building a new, better and peace-loving Japan.

You should take steps now to cease military resistance. Otherwise, we shall resolutely employ this bomb and all our other superior weapons to promptly and forcefully end the war."

Children were particularly affected. Many lost parents or siblings. In the book "Under the mushroom cloud. The fate of the children of Nagasaki" (ed. Takashi Nagai), children describe how they experienced the atomic bombing.

Here is the account of Yoko Iwanaga (aged 7):

"As I was playing 'father, mother, child' behind the bathroom, I saw a blue flash. Frightened, I ran away. Then our house creaked and collapsed. All the houses in the entire neighbourhood collapsed.

Many neighbours lay around the collapsed houses: some were bleeding heavily, others had their skin peeled off. Some were not moving at all.

There were also some who moved at first, but then suddenly stopped moving.

It started to rain. Heavy rain poured down on the neighbours, older girls and friends who were lying here and there."

The teachers wrote down the stories of first graders who could not yet write. In the foreword, Takashi Nagai writes:

"The aim of making this book available to the public is to make the cries of the children of the

atomic wasteland heard far and wide; they are calling out to us with one voice: 'We don't want war anymore!'"

### The Nagasaki Peace Park

The Peace Park (symbolic "Zone of Hope" was established in 1955 in the immediate vicinity north of the hypocentre of the atomic bomb explosion. At its northern end is the Statue of Peace, built by Japanese sculptor *Seibo Kitamura*. The statue is a monument that strives for the highest of all goals for humanity: world peace. At the same time, the Statue of Peace is a memorial to the danger of nuclear weapons. The statue's right arm points to the sky against the threat of nuclear weapons, and its left arm, held horizontally, symbolises the desire for peace.



Statue of Peace. (Picture ms)

In 1969, the park was expanded to include the Fountain of Peace. The fountain commemorates all those who died crying for water after the atomic bomb was dropped. The tragic fate of the victims is recorded in an inscription from the diary of a girl who was affected:

"I was so thirsty, so I drank the water that was contaminated with oil."

Since 1978, part of the park has been designated as a sculpture park. Statues donated by countries from all over the world have been erected here as symbols of peace. Every year on 9 August, a peace memorial service is held.



"Hymn to Life" donated by the city of Pistoia in Italy, 1987. (Picture ms)

### Chiran Peace Museum

Probably no museum demonstrates the futility of war more impressively than this one: the focus is on the kamikaze pilots, known in Japanese as *tokko* ("special attack forces"). About two kilometres west of Chiran lies the former air base from which 1,036 kamikaze pilots took off during the Second World War. Today, the large, thought-provoking Kamikaze Peace Museum stands on this site. It displays aircraft, memorabilia and photos of the young men who were selected for the special attack corps. The farewell letters they wrote to their loved ones, mostly mothers, wives and friends, before their final mission are deeply moving.

Here is a farewell letter from *Toshio Kuramoto* to his pregnant wife:

"Dear Kimiko,  
Please forgive me for leaving so suddenly. My heart was full of emotion, and I didn't want to make you sad. I love you so much, and I never intended to lie to you. I sincerely hope that you will strive courageously to avoid suffering and grief and continue with your life. From now on, I will be gone. Thank you, thank you very much. I have been a happy man. I am glad to go. I wish you happiness and good health."

He wrote to his unborn child:

"My dear child  
If you are a boy, please be a strong Japanese man. If you are a girl, please be a kind-hearted woman. Please take good care of your mother and be dutiful to her. From your father."

Toshio Kuramoto died on 11 May 1945, aged 30. He had been married for a month and did not want to tell Kimiko that he was a kamikaze pilot. On 27 January 1946, his wife gave birth to a girl.



Toshio Kuramoto.  
(Picture ma)

### **“Nihon Hidankyo” receives Nobel Peace Prize**

The Japanese organisation “Nihon Hidankyo” was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

Nihon Hidankyo was founded on 10 August 1956 during the Second World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs by survivors of the two atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The world conference was launched in 1955 in response to growing public opposition to atomic and hydrogen bombs following the US hydrogen bomb test on 1 March 1954 on Bikini Atoll.

In Japan, the survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are called “hibakusha”. Through their accounts of the human suffering and horrific damage they experienced, they have made a valuable contribution to remembrance.

*(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)*