

community

# U.S. and Japan must apologize for war crimes

Acknowledging responsibility for the atomic bombings and atrocities in Asia could serve as first steps toward a world free of nuclear arms

FOREIGN AGENDA

The following is a letter to U.S. President Barack Obama on behalf of eight organizations involved in anti-nuclear or peace movements in and around Hiroshima. None is associated with a political party.

Dear Mr. President, I would be most grateful if you would kindly spare the time to read this letter.

When Her Excellency Ms. Caroline Kennedy, U.S. ambassador to Japan, visited Nagasaki city on Dec. 10, she toured the Atomic Bomb Museum and Peace Park, and met A-bomb survivors. The ambassador called the visit a “deeply moving experience” and said that you, Mr. President, have “been working very hard” on the issue of nuclear disarmament.

Encouraged by her statements, the mayor of Hiroshima, Kazumi Matsui, and his counterpart in Nagasaki, Tomihisa Taue, visited the ambassador in Tokyo on Dec. 16, and invited you both to the peace memorial ceremonies of both cities on Aug. 6 and 9, 2014. Ten days after this visit, Mr. Matsui and Mr. Taue sent a joint letter to you through the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo making the same request.

We citizens of Hiroshima sincerely hope you will come. We also urge you to acknowledge that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 was a crime against humanity involving the indiscriminate mass killing of civilians. Accordingly, we urge you to offer an official apology to the victims of these war atrocities. We are convinced that an American apology is vital to achieve the abolishment of nuclear weapons. We also sincerely believe that doing so will increase pressure on the Japanese government to acknowledge its own war crimes of the 1940s.

Allow me to explain our reasoning. On Aug. 9, 1945, President Harry Truman addressed the American people on the radio:

“The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians. But that attack is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, ... unfortunately, thousands of civilian lives will be lost. ...

“Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare.” (Emphasis added.)

Truman justified the act of instantly and indiscriminately killing an estimated 70,000–80,000 citizens with the ironic excuse that he was trying to avoid killing civilians. This justification was further inflated with the 1947 claim that using the bomb had saved the lives of 1 million people, and helped end the war. Even today, this myth is deeply rooted in the assumptions of most Americans.

Truman’s explanation that the atomic bombing was a retaliatory attack against the Japanese military’s numerous war crimes — which we acknowledge took place — betrayed his complete lack of awareness that his order was itself one of the gravest war crimes in human history. Retaliating against a criminal act with another criminal act is never acceptable.

The U.S. government has persistently

used this justification to defend the use of the atomic bombs. However, as conclusively demonstrated in scholarly literature, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not decisive in ending the war. This argument was a myth, tacitly endorsed by the Japanese government for self-serving reasons. Yet even if the myth were true, no historical or political justification can legitimize the mass indiscriminate killing of civilians.

For 15 long years, Japan embarked on a war of aggression in Asia and, long after it became clear that defeat was inevitable, refused to surrender. In our view, therefore, Japan’s government of the time and its leader, Emperor Hirohito, share together with the U.S. authorities the responsibility — both legal and moral — for the devastation caused by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Forced laborers sent from Japanese colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, and from occupied China and Southeast Asia, also became victims. The Japanese government unquestionably bears some moral responsibility toward these people, if not legal responsibility.

The Japanese government in 1945 emphasized the illegality of the two bombs and the devastation they caused, a tactic that allowed the Emperor and his advisers to avoid confronting their own record of war crimes. Immediately after the bombing of Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945, Tokyo sent a letter, signed by Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, through the Swiss government, protesting the U.S. action. The letter asserted:

“It is the fundamental principle of international law in wartime that belligerents do not possess unlimited rights regarding the choice of the means of harming the enemy, and that we must not employ arms, projectiles or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering. They are each clearly defined by the Annex to the Hague Convention respecting the Law and Customs of War on Land, and by Article 22 and Article 23(e) of the Regulations respecting the Law and Customs of War on Land.”

The letter further condemned the United States:

“The indiscriminateness and cruelty of the bomb that the U.S. used this time far

**Japan’s postwar government attributed the defeat to narrow technological factors and began enthusiastically laying the groundwork for the development of science and technology, which, within a decade, would include atomic energy.**

exceed those of poisonous gases and similar weapons, the use of which is prohibited because of these very qualities. The U.S. has ignored the fundamental principle of international law and humanity and has been widely conducting the indiscriminate bombing of the cities of our Empire, killing many children, women and old people, and burning and destroying shrines, schools, hospitals and private dwellings. Withal, they used a novel bomb, the power of which exceeds any existing weapons and projectiles in its indiscriminateness and cruelty. The use of such a weapon is a new crime against human culture.”



Never again: An aerial view shows the devastation wrought by the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945, in a picture supplied by the Daily News company. The attack by U.S. forces came three days after a similar device was dropped on Hiroshima. Estimates of the death toll from the bombings and their aftereffects range between 150,000 and 250,000. KYODO

Undoubtedly, those who drafted the letter were familiar with international law. The letter sternly condemns not only the atomic bombings but also the air raids on other cities as indiscriminate mass killings in violation of international law (the Hague Convention). This was, however, the first and only protest letter the Japanese government ever issued on the atomic bombings.

On Aug. 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito stated in his Imperial Rescript on the Termination of the War:

“The enemy has begun to employ a new and cruel bomb with incalculable power to damage and destroy many innocent lives. If we continue to fight, it would not only result

destruction of human civilization. The Emperor therefore agreed to unconditional surrender, and expressed concern for “our allied nations of East Asia, who have consistently cooperated with the Empire toward the emancipation of East Asia.”

Singling out the atomic bombings as the decisive factor in his decision to surrender allowed Hirohito to completely ignore the crimes committed by the Japanese military in its war of aggression across Asia and the Pacific, as well as the anti-Japanese resistance that was being waged across Asia. Not only that, he exploited the A-bomb damage to indirectly justify the “war to liberate Asia.”

Thus, the rescript articulated the myth that the atomic bombings alone forced Japan to surrender, which helped cultivate an exclusively victim mentality. The atomic bombings became a means to conceal not only the responsibility of the Emperor and other wartime leaders, but also that of the Japanese people for a war in the name of the Japanese Empire that cost tens of millions of lives throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Just as President Truman fabricated a myth to cover up his government’s responsibility for its grave war crimes, the Japanese government used the same A-bomb attacks to conceal its own war responsibility.

Prince Higashikuni, who on Aug. 16, 1945, was ordered by the Emperor to form a new Cabinet, stated that wartime Japan’s greatest mistake had been to neglect science and technology. Tamon Maeda, the new education minister, also said at his first press conference: “We lost to the enemy’s science. This was made clear by a single bomb dropped on Hiroshima.”

Thus, the new postwar Cabinet, too, disregarded war crimes on both sides. It attributed the defeat to narrow technological factors and began enthusiastically laying the

groundwork for the development of science and technology, which, within a decade, would include atomic energy.

In 1955, five hibakusha from Hiroshima and Nagasaki filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government, seeking compensation for their losses. In the subsequent so-called Shimoda trial, the Japanese government made a complete about-face from its previous position, articulated in its protest letter against the atomic bombings 10 years earlier.

“The use of the atomic bomb hastened Japan’s surrender and consequently prevented belligerents on both sides from being injured or killed. ... Examined objectively, no one can conclude whether or not the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki violated international law. Moreover, given that an international agreement to ban the use of nuclear weapons is yet to be formulated, we think that it is not possible to hastily define it illegal. ... From the viewpoint of international law, war is fundamentally a situation in which a country is allowed to exercise all means deemed necessary to cause the enemy to surrender.”

When dealing with its own citizens, then, the Japanese government fully backed the United States’ justification for the atomic bombings. The ruling’s claim that in most cases it is permissible to use any method to win a war also conveniently served to justify Japan’s wartime acts.

The judgment in the Shimoda trial stated, however, that the atomic bombings were a clear violation of international law, citing several conventions. An International Peoples’ Tribunal in 2006 and 2007 also acknowledged the criminality of the atomic bombing of these two Japanese cities ([www.k3.dion.ne.jp/~a-bomb/indexen.htm](http://www.k3.dion.ne.jp/~a-bomb/indexen.htm))

This history helps explain why today, again, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other politicians are intent on denying Japan’s

war responsibility. Furthermore, on Dec. 26 last year, Abe violated Japan’s Constitution by visiting Yasukuni Shrine, where many deceased war criminals, including Gen. Hideki Tojo, are enshrined as gods. Needless to say, such actions are the prime source of the current serious diplomatic friction between Japan and many other nations, including China and South Korea. In our view, the origin lies in the Emperor’s Rescript on the Termination of the War. In other words, because as a nation Japan does not openly recognize its wartime criminality or its own responsibility for those acts, it denies the illegality of similar crimes that the United States perpetrated against the Japanese people. Many in Japan are caught in a vicious cycle: Precisely because they do not thoroughly appreciate the criminality of the brutal acts the U.S. committed against them or pursue U.S. responsibility for those acts, they are incapable of considering the pain suffered by the victims (Allied POWs and Asian peoples) of their own crimes or the gravity of their responsibility for the crimes.

I apologize for this rather lengthy historical explanation, but here is our request in a nutshell:

We are most grateful for Ambassador Kennedy’s statements. However, we strongly believe that in order to abolish nuclear weapons, it is essential to recognize that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were crimes against humanity. One major reason that nuclear weapons have proliferated rather than been abolished in the nearly 70 years since that nuclear holocaust is that this fact has been ignored. We feel strongly that a contributing factor is the failure of the U.S. government to seriously scrutinize and act upon its responsibility for this criminal act.

The first vital step toward ensuring the abolition of nuclear weapons would be for you, Mr. President, as a Nobel Peace laureate, to courageously acknowledge that the acts your nation committed in August 1945 were crimes, and for you to offer an official apology to the victims. We are, of course, painfully aware of how politically difficult it would be for you to take such unprecedented action. However, we also recall your claim to “advocate for change” when you became president in 2009. We have no doubt that such courageous action would be a historic, epoch-making “change,” and would dramatically improve the prospects for nuclear disarmament across the globe.

Equally importantly, your action would force the Japanese government and politicians to consider their own responsibility. As you are aware, the Japanese government continues to create instability in Northeast Asia by denying its culpability for wartime atrocities. We believe that American acknowledgement of the criminal nature of the atomic bombing would lead to similar actions by Japan toward its Asian neighbor nations. Ultimately, this would contribute to peace in this region.

Thank you, Mr. President, for reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,  
YUKI TANAKA

*This letter was written on behalf of the Hiroshima Association for Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution; the Hiroshima Network for the Solution of Japan’s Military “Comfort Women” Issue; Peace Link for Hiroshima, Kure and Iwakuni; the North East Asia Information Center; the Hiroshima branch of the Civil Association for Supporting Korean A-Bomb Survivors; and the August 6 Hiroshima Peace Assembly. Foreign Agenda offers a forum for opinion on Thursdays. Please send all your comments and ideas to [community@japantimes.co.jp](mailto:community@japantimes.co.jp).*

Do you think the nuclear issue should be the focus of the Tokyo election, and who would you like to see win?

IEWS FROM THE STREET: TOKYO

Mark Buckton

Tokyoites go to the polls Sunday to elect a governor to replace Naoki Inose, who quit his post in December amid a political funding scandal. The main candidates are ex-health minister Yoichi Masuzoe, ex-Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, lawyer Kenji Utsunomiya and former Self-Defense Forces chief Toshio Tamogami.



**Annemarie Luck**  
Deputy editor, 35 (South African)  
The nuclear issue should definitely be part of the election; it has the potential to affect the future of everyone in Japan. Other factors should come into play too, so I’d like to see Utsunomiya win, as he is anti-nuclear but also focuses on broader issues.



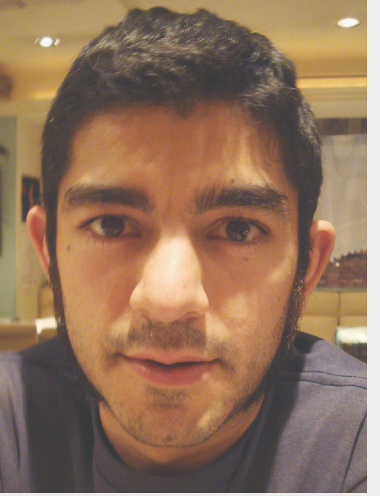
**Tai Yomo**  
Publishing sales, 42 (Japanese)  
I do think the nuclear issue should be part of the discussions. The Fukushima No. 1 plant was run by Tepco — and it was Tokyo consumers who used electricity from it, after all. I follow politics and care about the country but I haven’t decided who to vote for yet.



**Natsu Ozawa**  
Musician, 30 (Japanese)  
I think the nuclear issue should indeed be part of the focus of the Tokyo election. We need to achieve a nuclear-free society democratically and without losing out financially in the process. For me, the only viable candidate is Kenji Utsunomiya!



**Yoshie Kawada**  
Student, 20 (Japanese)  
I don’t think nuclear power should play a role, because in reality the issues will never be solved. As for who should win, either Masuzoe, being an ex-lawmaker, or Tamogami, a former SDF head, know enough to do the job. I think Masuzoe will win.



**Daish Malani**  
Game designer, 35 (Australian)  
Although Tokyo is not responsible for nuclear issues, it is heavily affected by them, so it should be a factor. Utsunomiya seems to stand for the underdogs, wants to help victims of the 2011 quake and hopes to abolish the nuclear system, so I’d back him.



**Akira Kato**  
Electrical engineer, 65 (Japanese)  
I don’t think the nuclear issue should feature as part of the debate surrounding the upcoming election, and while there’s no particular candidate I support at the moment, I presume that Masuzoe, the former Diet member, will win.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

If you have a community event planned, please fill in the form here: [www.japantimes.co.jp/community-listings-form/](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community-listings-form/). Education listings run on Mondays, charities and other causes on Tuesdays, shared activities are on Thursdays and social and spiritual listings are published on Saturdays. Full listings at [www.japantimes.co.jp/community/event-listings](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/event-listings).

SHARED INTERESTS FUKUOKA

**Sweets Marathon in Fukuoka:** This unique event in Fukuoka combines two unlikely candidates: sweets and running! Runners are supplied with a colorful assortment of mini-cakes and desserts at aid stations along the way, while spectators can visit booths selling even more sweets! The run will take place on Sun., Feb. 9, at

Uminonakamichi Kaihinkoen, 18-25 Saitozaki, Higashi-ku. For details of categories and fees, please visit [www.sweets-marathon.jp](http://www.sweets-marathon.jp)

KANAGAWA

**“Drops of Heaven” film screenings in Zushi:** The first screenings with English subtitles of this 113-minute documentary film on the life and philosophy of cookery expert Yoshiko Tatsumi will be held twice daily until Sat., Feb. 8, at 10 a.m. and

3 p.m. at Cinema Amigo, 1-5-14 Shinjuku, Zushi city, Kanagawa. Price: ¥1,500. Phone: 046-873-5643. Web: <http://cinema-amigo.com/movie/000183.html>

NAGOYA

**Nagoya Castle to hold New Year’s festival until Sun., Feb. 9:** The Honmaru Palace and precious paintings on paper doors and screens will be open to the public during the period. Admission is ¥500. For junior high school students and younger

children, it is free. The castle is open between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. and is a five-minute walk from Shiyakusho Station (Meijo subway line). More details at [www.nagoyajo.city.nagoya.jp/index.html](http://www.nagoyajo.city.nagoya.jp/index.html) (in Japanese) or by calling 052-231-1700

TOKYO

**Medieval Cage Match:** The Japan Armored Battle League will be hosting STEEL! on

Sun., Feb. 23, 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m., at the Womb nightclub in Shibuya. The event is to include a full-contact combat tournament between knights and samurai in armour, one-on-one and group fights. Swords, axes, halberds and a full range of medieval weapons are allowed. For ¥4,000, spectators can watch the matches from ringside, or for ¥3,000, standing. Please visit <http://passmarket.yahoo.co.jp/event/show/detail/0140afwk3dbf.html> or <http://armoredbattle.com> for further information