

Hiroshima, Fukushima, and the global crisis of violence: Where do we go from here?

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I commend the Maui College Peace Club, Maui Peace Action, the interfaith communities and everyone involved in putting together this commemoration. You are carrying on an important tradition.

For many people in the peace movement, remembering the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Aug, 6th and 9th 1945, are annual peace days of obligation. Our downfall is to forget. May we never forget. And may humanity never again unleash such horror.

So let us remember together. On Aug. 6, 1945 a B-29 U.S. bomber named Enola Gay after the pilot's mother, dropped a uranium atomic bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. It exploded at 8:16AM Three days later the U.S. dropped a plutonium atomic bomb at 11:01 AM nicknamed "Fat Man" on the city of Nagasaki. The actual amount of plutonium in the Nagasaki bomb was about the size of a softball weighing 14 pounds— it had the explosive equivalent of 22,000 tons of TNT. In two blinding flashes of light, heat and radiation, these cities were leveled. The ultimate toll was more than 200,000 people killed and many more injured who would later die of radiation poisoning.

It is a commonly believed myth that the bombs were dropped to end the war, but many top U.S. military leaders of the day said that the outcome of the war was clear. Here are some of the military leaders words:

"...Japan was already defeated and...dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary..."
General Dwight David Eisenhower (Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, pp 312-313)

"Use of the bomb was completely unnecessary from a military point of view." General Douglass MacArthur (James, The Years of MacArthur, p. 775)

(Before the bombing) Admiral William Leahy said: "Mr. president, this would violate every Christian ethic I have ever heard of and all known laws of war. It would be an attack on the noncombatant population of the enemy... (And after the bombing) Admiral Leahy said: "My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages." Admiral William D. Leahy (Leahy, I was There, p. 440-441)

In most American school textbooks there is no hint of controversy regarding the decision to drop the bombs. In the U.S. Army's Leadership, Education, and Training (LET 3) Custom Edition for Army JROTC textbook used by ½ million American high school students enrolled in JROTC classes nationwide, it is stated that atomic weapons were used to forestall an invasion of Japan that would have cost a million American lives. (OpEdNews.com Aug. 2, 2013 by Pat Elder)

Yet today we know:

1. the bombs weren't needed to end the war;
2. the idea that dropping the bombs saved a million American lives was a fabrication;
3. Japan was seeking surrender and simply wanted to retain the institution of the emperor.
4. The atomic bombs were experiments. The bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was a uranium bomb. The bomb that destroyed Nagasaki was a plutonium bomb. The U.S. military had both types and both were used.
5. These bombs were not the last chapter of WWII but the first chapter of the Cold War with the Russians. They were a dramatic show of power to the Russians about who was going to be the world's #1 power after the war.

Lost in all the power politics were the death and suffering of innocent people –civilians –men, women and children. Today such deaths of the innocent are often referred to as collateral damage. The pattern of warfare in history has been that the distance between killer and victim has continued to increase and the percentage of civilians killed and injured has increased as well. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki constituted murder on an epic scale. We must ask ourselves, what if it was my child who was killed, my wife, or mother or grandfather, or my whole family. Somehow we must all come to realize our interconnectedness as a human family in calling for peace on earth. A call for peace is a call to make our communities safe from violence and the threat of war, conventional and nuclear, and safe for every person's right to life.

Ann Wright, who many of you know, recently alerted me to the following. It's a remarkable interconnectedness of people tied to Hiroshima but in very different ways. It recently came to light through a discovery of letters in Hiroshima city by Fumie Takahashi, the wife of Mr. Akihiro Takahashi. The exchange of letters were between Mr. Takahashi who worked as a curator of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum from 1979-1983 and died in Nov. 2011 at the age of 80 and Mr. Paul Tibbets who was the captain and pilot of the plane Enola Gay that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Mr. Tibbets died in Nov. 2007 at the age of 92. Mr. Takahashi was an Hibakusha, a Hiroshima A bomb survivor. He was a student in the schoolyard of Hiroshima Municipal Junior High School 1.4 kilometers from the hypocenter and lost many friends by the bomb from the plane Mr. Tibbets piloted. Mr. Tibbets and Mr. Takahashi actually met in Washington DC in 1980 and talked at a park near where an exhibition on the atomic bombs was being held. The two men talked for about 30 minutes and held each others hands during the entire time and promised to send letters to each other before saying good by. They exchanged letters for several years with Mr. Takahashi even inviting Mr. Tibbets to come to Hiroshima. Mr. Tibbets declined to go back to Hiroshima due to his heavy burden, or "heavy trouble" as he put it, but said in another letter to Mr. Takahashi (quote) "I pray that your efforts for promoting peace will be recompensed and such days will continue." (end quote) Mr. Takahashi continued to write to Mr. Tibbets until 2005, a total of 25 years from their first meeting. That's quite a story of interconnectedness and I hope more will be written about their meeting and exchange of letters.

Immediately after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the allied occupation authorities banned all mention of radiation poisoning. It was insisted that people were killed or injured from the bomb's blast. The NY Times ran a front page headline that said "No Radioactivity in Hiroshima Ruin." Thus began the cover-up of the entire nuclear cycle and its poisonous consequences at each step along the way. From the mining and milling of uranium, to the enrichment process, to the testing of nuclear weapons, to the deadly consequences of nuclear power generation at places like Chernobyl, Three Mile island, and of course Fukushima. Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are directly linked. They do not represent the seeds of peace, but rather disease, suffering and death for present and future generations.

Nuclear testing: Nearly 300 atomic and hydrogen bombs have been exploded in the Pacific by the U.S., France, and Great Britain. French Polynesia and the Marshall Islands have paid the heaviest price though Hawaii appears significantly impacted from the 12 tests and 2 aborted tests at Johnston island located 500 miles southwest of Hawaii. A U.S. Atomic Energy Commission study done to determine plutonium 239 fallout from atmospheric testing found that of 65 randomly selected soil samples taken worldwide, Hawaii had the highest concentration of plutonium of the sites tested.

Fukushima reactor units One, Two, and Three, not only melted down but exploded in March 2011 after decades of assurance that commercial nuclear reactors could not explode. Unit Four's structural integrity has been undermined. The nightmare at Fukushima is far from over. The owners of the Fukushima reactors –Tokyo Electric (TEPCO) has admitted that radioactive water has been leaking into the Pacific ever since the disaster began on March 11, 2011. A report of 40% rise in thyroid irregularities among young children in the area is causing a growing concern about widespread health impacts from Fukushima's fallout. And perhaps the greatest threat comes from a spent fuel pool containing many tons of highly radioactive used fuel suspended 100 feet in the air, within an unstable structure. Should this fuel pool collapse there's a high likelihood the fuel rods could catch fire. According to long-time nuclear watchdog and writer, Harvey Wasserman, in the event of a fuel pool fire, "the radioactive emissions could be catastrophic. Intensely lethal emissions could spew for a very long time, eventually circling the globe many times, wrecking untold havoc. Meanwhile TEPCO is moving to restart other reactors around the country while it is dealing with the ongoing crisis at Fukushima far from under control, and in fact getting worse." Radiation being released into the environment within the last few weeks have been the highest levels measured at Fukushima since the initial disaster in March 2011, When will the world respond collectively to deal effectively with this global emergency? It appears efforts are to downplay the crisis to protect the nuclear industry instead of people's health and safety and the planet's environment. (See The Progressive, July 23, 2013 "You Think the Fukushima Disaster is Over? Think Again" by Harvey Wasserman)

The entire global nuclear power and weapons complex will keep on killing generations far into the future because of the long killing power of radiation. At Hanford, Washington, and at other places throughout the vast industrial nuclear complex that extends across the U.S. and the globe, dangerous radioactive contamination is taking place.

Hawaii is not exempt. The Navy acknowledges discharging 4,843,000 gallons of radioactive liquid waste into Pearl Harbor between 1964 and 1973. The Navy stopped releasing such data after 1973. So much for transparency. But the Navy has also admitted dumping over two thousand 55-gallon steel drums of radioactive solid waste onto the ocean floor off Oahu's southern shore. The waste included contaminated tools and clothing from the refueling of nuclear submarines at Pearl Harbor. What effects such pollution may have on marine life and, in turn, the health and safety of Hawaii's people is simply not clear. But it is commonly accepted that there is no safe level of radiation, and even low-level doses of radiation accelerate our aging process. (Albertini, "The Dark Side of Paradise," p. 18) (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, April 4, 1979 Nuclear Waste)

Pearl Harbor is a major nuclear force installation and has been officially designated a toxic superfund site, due to a wide range of military toxins contaminating the base. Up to 23 nuclear-powered and armed submarines have been home ported at Pearl Harbor at any one time along with other nuclear warships that frequent the harbor. In addition, the West Loch Naval Ammunition depot located inside Pearl Harbor includes nuclear weapons storage and maintenance facilities. Over the years nuclear weapons have been stored at the Lualualei Naval Ammunition Depot and the former Waikele Naval Ammunition depot and trucked through, and helicoptered over, civilian residential neighborhoods, between military bases on Oahu. I have been told of nuclear weapon accidents having occurred on Oahu and in Hawaiian waters where radiation has been released, but officially all such accidents are classified top secret.

Besides Pearl Harbor, Hawaii is home to the overall command and control centers for U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines forces in the Pacific and over 100 military installations. The CINCPAC (Commander in Chief Pacific) is based at Camp H.M. Smith in Aiea Heights above Aloha Stadium and includes a several story underground nuclear command center. And on the runway on the Hickam Air Force base side of Honolulu International Airport is a 24 hour standby alert aircraft called the Blue Eagle which is an airborne nuclear war command center. Also of note are the dozens of submarine tracker and hunter P-3 Orion (or updated) planes now based at Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station. They do a lot of touch and go training at civilian airports throughout Hawaii (including Hilo, possibly Kahului). A distinctive feature of the plane is a stinger straight out the back of the tail section. These hi-tech sub hunter planes can be equipped with nuclear weapons to destroy submarines if so ordered. Maui, as far as I know, is still tied in to U.S. first strike nuclear war plans through its Air Force Satellite tracking station on Haleakala and military super computers in Kihei.

There is another kind of nuclear weapon that does not have the explosive power of an atomic or hydrogen bomb but does pose radiation health problems. It's made from the uranium left over once uranium 235 is extracted to make A & H bombs and nuclear reactor fuel. It's referred to as Depleted uranium or DU and consists mainly of Uranium 238. Depleted Uranium (DU) radiation spotting rounds have been confirmed fired at Schofield Barracks on Oahu and the Pohakuloa Training Area (PTA) on Hawaii Island. They may also have been fired at Makua Valley on Oahu, Kaho'olawe Island and possibly other Hawaii sites as well. It is also possible that other DU munitions have been used at these sites since for decades DU munitions were allowed to be used in training.

DU weapons are used today in a wide variety of weapons for armor piercing and bunker busting. Such weapons were used extensively by the U.S. in Kosovo, and the 1st Gulf war to destroy Iraqi retreating tanks in the Basra area of southern Iraq. They were also used extensively by the U.S. in Fallujah, Baghdad and other sites in Iraq. The genetic damage and cancer rates in Fallujah is worse than that seen among survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki according to a report published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. Uranium has been found in the hair of parents of children with congenital anomalies. A long-awaited study on congenital birth defects in Iraq by the World Health Organization (WHO) is expected to be very extensive in nature. Its release continues to be delayed but it is clear the report will not examine the link between the prevalence of birth defects and use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions used during the war and occupation of Iraq, according to WHO. Experts say, DU munitions vaporize on contact, generating dust that is easily inhaled and cause serious health problems. Susanne Soederberg, a professor and Canada research Chair at Queens University who is also waiting for the WHO study to be published, said: "I strongly believe that the WHO, like most international organizations, is not a neutral body, but is influenced by the geopolitical powers of its members." She continued, "So, yes, there is a reason why a group of very smart scientists are not exploring the 'why' question in their study."

The real human bottom line of DU weapons, and all weapons of war, is something former General and U.S. President Eisenhower talked about more than 50 years ago when he said: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a theft from those who are hungry and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world of ours is not spending money alone – it is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists – the hopes of its children... This is not a way of life at all in any true sense...it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the dawn of the nuclear age, our world has become increasingly engulfed in a global crisis of violence that now threatens the very future of life on earth. Ongoing wars and a growing number of nations with nuclear weapons speak to this. There are now 9 countries with nuclear weapons –the U.S., Russia, Great Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea. Add to this the violence of climate change, the plundering of the earth's resources, and even the genetic modification of our very food supply. All for what? Ever increasing short-term profits? Ever increasing consumption, energy demands? Addictions eventually kill. And greed and our addiction to war may prove to be the worst addictions of all.

So, where do we go from here? Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a start! Remembering Fukushima too. Saying we remember and will not forget, is a good beginning. Today marks the 50th anniversary signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban treaty that put an end to nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, water, and outer space. By stopping such testing this treaty saved thousands, perhaps millions of lives. But it's still only a beginning of what needs to be done.

Let's also remember the meaning of sacred and put the interest of the common good over personal gain. Let us remember the meaning of solidarity. We are all in this together. An injury to one is an injury to all. Walk in each others shoes. Stand in memory of those who have gone before us and make a better world for those who will follow us. An urgent global need is for

justice and peace in the Middle East. More weapons and war in Syria, etc. is not the answer to an already highly charged region. Justice for Palestinians is long, long overdue. A Mid-East nuclear-weapon free zone would be an important step in defusing nuclear tensions. It seems that many want to talk about Iran's potential to acquire nuclear weapons but few are willing to talk about Israel's existing hundreds of nuclear weapons. Why is that? But the U.S. cannot talk about the speck in other country's eyes, and ignore the log in its own eye – thousands of U.S. nuclear weapons.

Rev. Martin Luther King said nearly 50 years ago that the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government – the U.S.A. In my view things haven't changed since Martin Luther King spoke those words. In fact they have gotten worse. The neocons are now firmly in control in the U.S. despite the presence of an African American president. The neocon's view is that since the U.S. is now the world's sole superpower, it is their number one mission to stay that way. That's Pax Americana – peace on America's terms and that imperial view of the world is a slippery slope to further global violence and fascism in the U.S. (Bob Aldridge, "America in Peril," p. 4.) The persecution of whistleblowers Bradley Manning for exposing war crimes, the hunting of Edward Snowden for disclosing the expanding U.S. surveillance state, and the increasing restrictions put on civil liberties, are all sign posts on the path to fascism and dictatorship in the U.S. I would say we've been on that path since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A native, or African American, perspective would likely say it goes back much further. Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation in 1961 warned us of the dangers of a growing military-industrial-complex, including a threat to civil liberties. Two books I would highly recommend reading are Bob Aldridge's book "America in Peril." A second book, especially during this 50th anniversary year of John F. Kennedy's death, is by James W. Douglass entitled "JFK and the Unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters." These two books will provide a very different, and more accurate view, of the U.S. than provided through the main stream media. It is a view, in my judgment we must face, if there is any hope of an aroused citizenry taking corrective action to save Hawaii, the U.S. our planet, and our very souls, from self destruction.

In the midst of a national and global crisis of violence, the rock foundation to stand upon is principled non-violence. Non-violence is all about–means and ends. Something we need to relearn from the organic process of life. Sowing seeds of peace produce the fruit of peace. The means and ends must cohere. The days of the quick fix are over. Peaceful and justice means must be used for building a peaceful and just world.

It's been said: live simply so others can simply live. Those of us living in industrialized countries must begin to walk much lighter on the planet. The resources of this earth much be shared and used wisely. True peace must be built on a foundation of justice for all, not justice for some. Otherwise it's a false peace and will not endure.

What does building a foundation of justice mean in Hawaii? Are we prepared to support an end to the U.S. military occupation of, and the restoration of, the Hawaii Nation? Along the way, are we prepared to stand in solidarity with Native Hawaiians to protect the sacred – Mauna Kea from domination by astronomy; Pele and the Hawaiian religion from desecration from geothermal drilling; burial sites, heiau, etc. from being commercialized, privatized, and industrialized? There

have even been attempts to patent and genetically modify Haloa – the Kalo plant, viewed in Hawaiian culture as the older sibling of the Hawaiian people. Can you imagine the nerve? When everything is viewed as a commodity, nothing is sacred. Are we willing to join with Hawaiians to build Pu'uhonua – wellness centers to help people heal, rather than build more prisons to punish, prisons which are filled disproportionately with Hawaiians? Some reports say that 60% of the prisoners in Hawaii prisons and Native Hawaiians.

What of economic justice? The gap between rich and poor must be narrowed not increased. A Hawaii Food Bank study says 25% of the children in Hawaii are food insecure amid pockets of people with extreme wealth in gated communities and luxury resorts with their own private jets. Where is the justice in that?

We are all living on borrowed time. Our destinies are tied together whether we realize it or not. We need to make profound changes and we need to begin now with all due diligence. Let us stand up, speak out, and act for justice, peace and aloha 'aina. Let us pray for the strength to live the courage of our convictions and try (however imperfectly) to be always gentle and kind to one another in the journey.

Aloha, mahalo, and may Akua bless, and have mercy on us all.

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