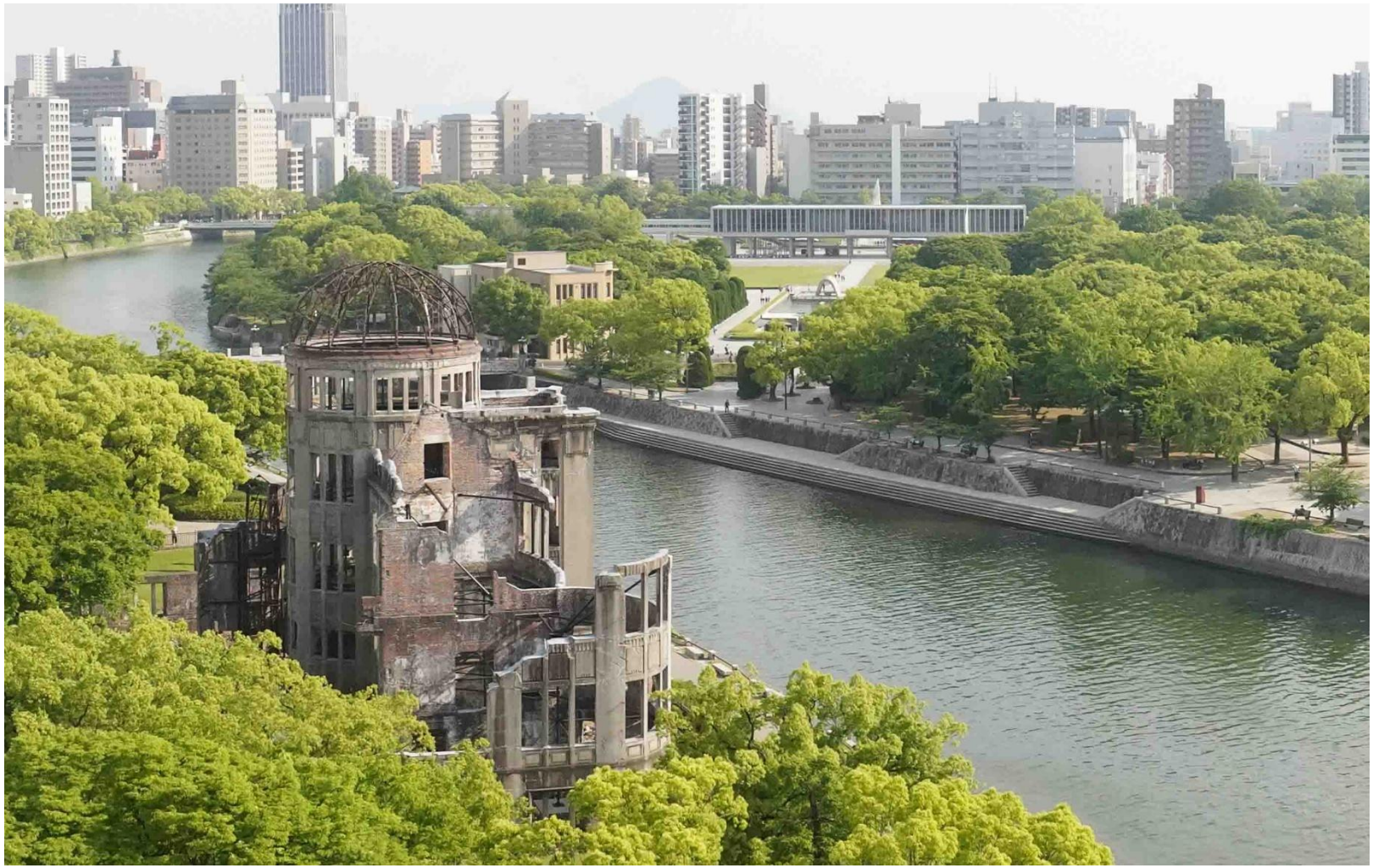
Chapter 6　Path to Peace Memorial City



6-01 A-Bomb Dome and Peace Park in 2025

Path to Peace Memorial City

The City of Hiroshima, which suffered unprecedented devastation as a result of the atomic bombing, aimed to rebuild as a “peace memorial city” from soon after the war.

In 1946, when the scars of the atomic bomb still remained deep, *Shisei Yoran* (an annual report on the outline of the city) published by the City of Hiroshima with the subtitle “First-Year Issue for Reconstruction” printed on the cover, proclaimed a lofty ideal: “Hiroshima is a peace memorial city for the world. The aim of the city’s reconstruction must be to build an ideal cultural city worthy of symbolizing world peace.”

On August 5, 1946, the federation of community associations in Hiroshima organized the Hiroshima Citizens’ Rally for Peace Restoration. The first Peace Festival (current Peace Memorial Ceremony) took place on August 6, 1947. On that day, Mayor Shinzo Hamai, who had become the first popularly elected Mayor of Hiroshima in April of that year, called for “building a true peace” and “renouncing war” in the Peace Declaration.

In 1949, in order to convey the devastation caused by the atomic bombing, the A-bomb Reference Material Display Room opened at the Central Community Center in Moto-machi to exhibit melted glass and porcelain pieces, roof tiles and other materials that had been collected from soon after the city was devastated by the bombing. In 1955, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was completed in Peace Memorial Park. This marked the beginning of full-scale exhibitions of artifacts from the atomic bombing and documentary photographs.

In 1955, the First World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was held in Hiroshima. Over the years, Hiroshima became a place where people from different nations and generations reflect on peace and call for peace. During the 1970s, atomic-bomb survivors and citizens of Hiroshima began to expand their activities, such as calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons at the United Nations.

The number of visitors to Hiroshima increased year after year, including tourists from within Japan and from overseas, students on school excursions, and political leaders from different countries. Hiroshima offers an opportunity for visitors to learn firsthand about the devastation caused by the atomic bombing, which is an important role for Hiroshima as a peace memorial city.

Peace Festival and Peace Declarations

On July 31, 1947, the City of Hiroshima enacted an ordinance to close its offices on August 6 every year, designating it as Peace Memorial Day.

6-02 First Peace Festival (August 6, 1947)

While Japan was still under the occupation of the GHQ/SCAP, the first Peace Festival was held on August 6, 1947 at the Peace Plaza at Jisenji-no-hana in Nakajima-honmachi (by the current Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound in Peace Memorial Park). This festival was organized by the Hiroshima Peace Festival Committee, which was established by the City of Hiroshima, the Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Hiroshima Tourism Association (later Hiroshima City Tourism Association).

At the Peace Festival, following a choral performance of the “Peace Song” (now the “Hiroshima Peace Song”), Hiroshima Mayor Shinzo Hamai read the Peace Declaration. At 8:15 a.m., the Peace Bell, unveiled that year, was rung.

In this first Peace Declaration, Mayor Hamai, representing the citizens of Hiroshima, called for the realization of world peace, stating: “Let us join to sweep away from this earth the horror and sin of war, and to build a true peace. Let us join in renouncing war eternally, and building the ideal of world peace on this earth.”

6-03 “Peace Song” sung in chorus (August 6, 1947)

Various people attended the festival, including Tatsuo Morito, Minister of Education; and Tsunei Kusunose, Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture. Messages were also received and read, including those from General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers; the commander-in-chief of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force; the chief of the Hiroshima Military Government Team; Prime Minister Tetsu Katayama; and the speaker of the Lower House and president of the Upper House.

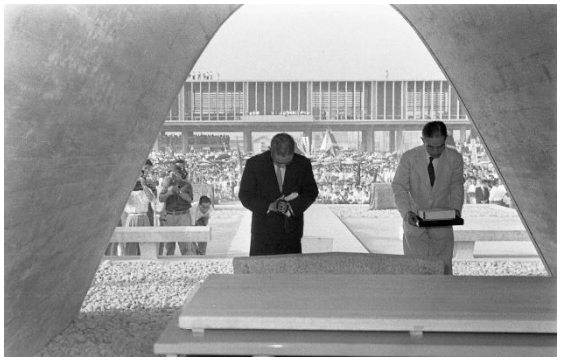
6-04 Mayor Hamai reading the Peace Declaration at the first Peace Festival (August 6, 1947)

The festival was broadcast live by the NHK Hiroshima Central Broadcasting Station and relayed to the United States.

Due to the outbreak of the Korean War, the 1950 Peace Festival was canceled on August 2, only four days before the scheduled date, in line with a request by the occupation forces. The peace rally planned by the Partisans of Peace Movement to coincide with the Peace Festival was deemed to be a Communist Party-led event that was "anti-occupation forces" and "anti-Japanese," and the authorities feared that the Peace Festival would be used to advocate political causes. In 1951, a peace memorial ceremony was held in the open space in front of the memorial mound at Jisenji-no-hana. However, the mayor did not give a peace declaration but a "greeting." An aircraft from the U.S. base in Iwakuni dropped a wreath of flowers, and it was offered to the victims' souls.

In 1952, the year Japan regained its sovereignty following the end of occupation by the GHQ/SCAP, the Peace Festival became the Memorial Service for the Atomic Bomb Victims and Peace Memorial Ceremony. It was held in front of the Memorial Monument for Hiroshima, City of Peace (Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims), completed that year. At this ceremony, the cenotaph was unveiled by children who had lost their parents in the atomic bombing, and the registers of the names of atomic bomb victims were placed inside. The Peace Declaration was revived, and Mayor Hamai delivered the message, stating that for world peace, people should be united "in a circle of moral consciousness."

The Peace Memorial Ceremony has since been held every year in largely the same way under different names, but the content of the Peace Declaration has evolved over time. Initially, there were no calls for the abolition of atomic bombs, but the declaration came to include a call for an international agreement to outlaw the manufacture and use of all nuclear weapons (1958), criticism of nuclear deterrence (1968), and Hiroshima's expectations of the United Nations (1972).



6-05 Mayor Tadao Watanabe (left), placing the registry of the names of atomic bomb victims in the cenotaph during the Peace Memorial Ceremony (August 6, 1955)

6-06 Peace Memorial Ceremony 10 years after the atomic bombing
In addition to bereaved families, participants in the First World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs also attended the Peace Memorial Ceremony. It is said that over 30,000 people prayed for the repose of the souls of the victims. Makeshift houses still remained within Peace Memorial Park. (August 6, 1955)

Collection and conservation of materials related to the atomic bombing

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

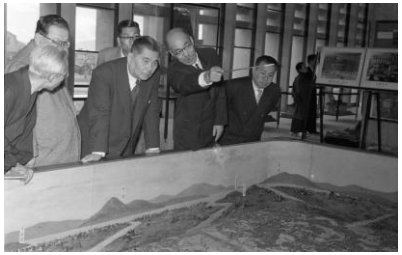
Shogo Nagaoka, a geologist, returned from a survey trip, and when he entered the devastated city on August 8, he noticed spikes on the melted surface of a stone lantern near the hypocenter in Moto-machi. He walked around the city and collected rocks, porcelain, and deformed bottles. From 1948, he continued his investigation of the atomic bombing, commissioned by the City of Hiroshima.

6-07 Atomic Bomb Reference Material Display Room at Central Community Center in Moto-machi (September 25, 1949)

In 1949, the Atomic Bomb Reference Material Display Room was set up at the Central Community Center in Moto-machi to display materials conveying the magnitude of the atomic bombing and the devastation it caused. The following year, the Atomic Bomb Memorial Hall was opened next to the community center to exhibit roof tiles, stones, concrete, plants and other materials exposed to the bomb.

6-08 Atomic Bomb Memorial Hall opened on the north side of Central Community Center (February 26, 1953)

In August 1955, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum opened in Peace Memorial Park, and Shogo Nagaoka became the first director.



6-09 Shogo Nagaoka, first Director of Peace Memorial Museum, explains an exhibit to visitors. (October 27, 1955)

People in sympathy with Nagaoka's activities formed an association to support collecting atomic-bomb related materials. They collected documents such as survivors' testimonies of the devastation of the atomic bombing and called on citizens to donate personal belongings left by the victims. After Nagaoka stepped down as director in 1962, he donated to the City of Hiroshima approximately 1,500 items he had personally collected. In the 1970s, many survivors donated their drawings related to the atomic bombing, and in the 1980s, the members of the Association of Photographers of the Atomic Bomb Destruction of Hiroshima donated photographs of Hiroshima taken in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing. Materials related to August 6 continue to be donated by citizens and bereaved families to the city today. As of August 2025, the museum held approximately 22,000 items.

These materials are not only exhibited at the Peace Memorial Museum but also used for Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Exhibitions held in Japan and abroad. They are also introduced on the Internet. Together with survivors' testimonies, these materials convey to people around the world the scale of the damage and the tragedy caused by the atomic bombing.

6-10 Panorama of Hiroshima at the entrance to the museum and visitors (April 1963)

6-11 Mother Teresa, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, joins her hands in prayer. (November 23, 1984)

6-12 Exhibits in the Main Building of the Peace Memorial Museum, including clothes victims were wearing on August 6.
The Main Building reopened in 2019 after major renovations. (April 2019)

Grassroots activities

Citizens' activities to shed light on the devastation of the atomic bombing expanded through coverage by the news media.

On August 3, 1966, NHK Hiroshima Central Broadcasting Station aired "Camera Report: 500-meter Radius from the Hypocenter." This 15-minute program, which attempted to reconstruct door-to-door maps of the area around the cenotaph in the Peace Park, had a great response from viewers. This set off a collaboration of former residents and Hiroshima University's Research Institute for Nuclear Medicine and Biology (now the Research Institute for Radiation Biology and Medicine) to conduct a project for the "reconstruction of ground zero," the area of the former Nakajima district in Peace Memorial Park. Along with this, in 1969 the City of Hiroshima allocated funds for a survey of the damage caused by the atomic bombing within two kilometers of the hypocenter. The following year the national government also allocated funds for the survey.

In the 1980s, citizens purchased 85,000 feet of archival footage filmed by the U.S. military and stored at the U.S. National Archives. The funds were raised through the "10-Feet Movement," which called for donations of 3,000 yen per 10 feet. The films were re-edited, adding testimonies of atomic bomb survivors, to create a trilogy including *Ningen o Kaese* (English title: *The Lost Generation*). These initiatives expanded citizen-led anti-nuclear movements.

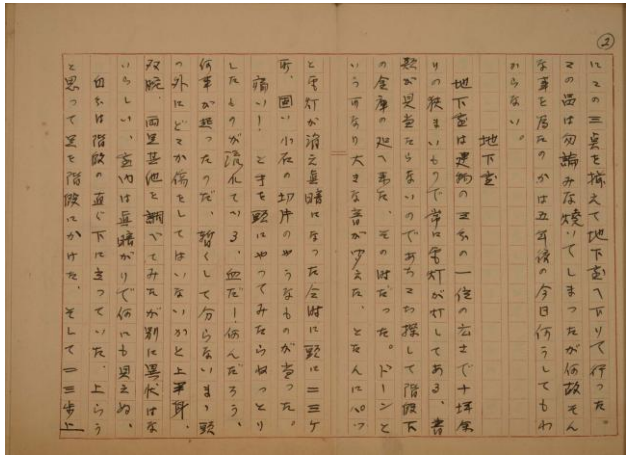
High school students in Hiroshima began excavating "A-bombed roof tiles," with their surfaces molten and bubbled due to the heat rays, buried in the riverbed of the Motoyasu River. This activity gradually spread to elementary and junior high school students and to high school students outside Hiroshima Prefecture, ultimately leading to a movement to make a monument from the roof tiles. Donations were sent in from all over Japan in response to the call, "Protect the roof tiles! Let the roof tiles speak!" In August 1982, the Hiroshima Monument for the A-bomb Victims was erected on the left (east) bank of the Motoyasu River.

Passing on the survivors' experiences

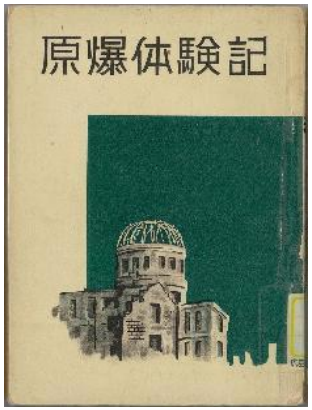
Collection and preservation of the survivors' memoirs and accounts of the atomic bombing

The effort to record atomic bomb survivors' accounts began with *Izumi: Mitamano maeni sasaguru* (Fountain: Offered to the Spirits of the Dead), a mimeographed collection of personal accounts compiled in August 1946 by students from the Prefectural Hiroshima First Middle School (now Kokutaiji High School) and others to mourn former classmates who had been mobilized to work and died in the atomic bombing.

In May 1950, the City of Hiroshima began collecting personal accounts of the atomic bombing from citizens and received a total of 165 accounts—84 from school children and 81 from the general public including university students (both at the time of the bombing). From among them, the Social Education Division of the city chose 18 accounts and compiled a book (134 pages) titled *Genbaku Taiken-ki* (Memoirs of the Atomic Bombing). However, distribution of the book was limited due to the outbreak of the Korean War, in which Japan became a base for U.S. military operations. Among the accounts not included in the book was one by a man who had lost two children. He wrote, "It is not enough if the Industrial Promotion Hall (A-Bomb Dome) will be the only memorial preserved." This shows that even during a period when reconstruction was the top priority, there were people who called for preserving atomic-bombed buildings to convey the horrors of the atomic bombing to the world.



6-13 An account by the only survivor at the Fuel Hall (now Peace Memorial Park Rest House), at about 170 meters from the hypocenter (1950)



6-14 *Genbaku Taiken-ki* (Memoirs of the Atomic Bombing), published in 1950

After the Treaty of Peace with Japan (Treaty of San Francisco) took effect in 1952, the publication of personal accounts by atomic bomb survivors and by bereaved families greatly increased year after year. In the 1970s, when people began to be concerned that memories of the atomic bombings were fading, survivors' groups affiliated with their former workplaces, local governments of which they were residents, and atomic bomb survivors' organizations throughout the country played a major role in publishing survivors' accounts. In the year 1995, fifty years after the atomic bombing, the number of publications exceeded 300, a record high. In the 2010s, the number declined as survivors aged, but their children and grandchildren as well as citizens continue to publish accounts of survivors whom they have listened to. These are collected and preserved by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, and other institutions, and are made available within the facilities and on websites.

6-15 Library at the Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims

The Peace Culture Foundation began filming atomic bomb survivors' testimonies in May 1986. The videos of the testimonies and documentary films on the atomic bombing are screened at the Peace Memorial Museum and other places, conveying the horrors of the atomic bomb.

As atomic bomb survivors aged, it became increasingly difficult to hear their testimonies directly. Therefore, "Legacy Successors" training programs began in 2012 to pass on the survivors' testimonies and their thoughts on peace to future generations. Lectures by these Legacy Successors began in 2015.

6-17 Legacy Successor's lecture (2024)

Survivors' testimonies and passing on the legacy

In April 1969, staff members of the Peace Memorial Museum began telling their own experiences of the atomic bombing to students visiting the museum on school trips. Later, survivors who had registered with the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation came to tell of their experiences. In 1975, when the Sanyo Shinkansen (bullet train) reached Hiroshima, the first school trip to Hiroshima by a public junior high school in Tokyo was conducted. Following that, the number of students visiting Hiroshima on school trips from around Japan increased. Not only members of survivors' organizations in Hiroshima but also individual survivors as well as teachers who are survivors and engaged in peace education began to tell of their experiences. These witnesses came to be called *kataribe* (those who give testimonies).

6-16 A survivor's testimony (2024)

Preservation of A-bombed buildings and trees

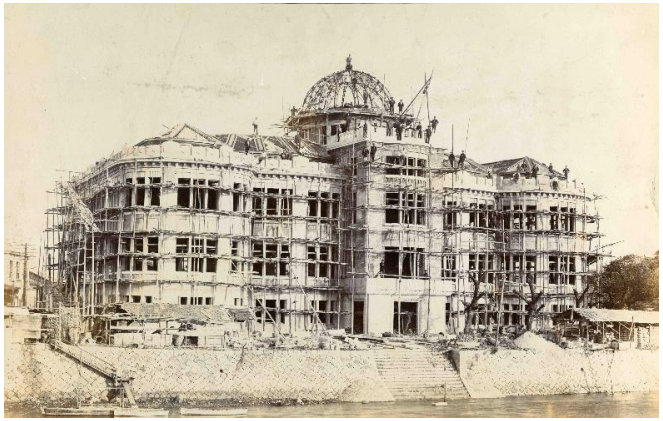
The atomic bomb left deep scars not only on humans but also on buildings and trees. The City of Hiroshima has surveyed the buildings and trees that survived the atomic bombing and has strived to preserve them. Among the largest surviving buildings, the four buildings of the former Hiroshima Army Clothing Depot in Minami Ward were designated a National Important Cultural Property in 2024, and Hiroshima Prefecture and the national government decided to preserve all four buildings.

6-18 Former Hiroshima Army Clothing Depot

Preservation of the A-Bomb Dome

Inauguration of the Exhibition Hall

Designed by Czech architect Jan Letzel, the A-Bomb Dome, which conveys the devastation of the atomic bombing to this day, was originally called the Hiroshima Prefectural Commercial Exhibition Hall. It was completed on April 5, 1915 as a facility to promote the industry in Hiroshima Prefecture. Later renamed the Hiroshima Prefectural Products Exhibition Hall (1921), and the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall (1933), it continued to display the products of Hiroshima Prefecture and conducted surveys and consultations related to commerce and industry in the prefecture. It also served as a venue for events like the Prefectural Art Exhibitions and the 1929 Showa Industrial Exposition, functioning as an art gallery and museum.



6-19 Hiroshima Prefectural Commercial Exhibition Hall under construction (1914)

6-20 Fourth National Confectionery and Candy Fair at the Hiroshima Prefectural Products Exhibition Hall (1921)

6-21 Banner for oil painting exhibition by Choko-kai (1930s)

It was a three-storied brick building, partially using steel frames, and stone and mortar for the exterior, and had a five-story stairwell in the center topped with an elliptical copper dome. In those days, such European-style buildings were rare in Hiroshima. With its beautiful reflection on the river, it became one of the most famous sights in Hiroshima.

The Industrial Promotion Hall ceased its operations in March 1944 as the war intensified. The building was then used by the Ministry of the Interior Chugoku-Shikoku Civil Engineering Branch Office, the Hiroshima District Lumber Control Corporation, and other control corporations.

6-22 Hiroshima Prefectural Products Exhibition Hall around 1930

Atomic bombing

On August 6, 1945, the atomic bomb detonated at an altitude of approximately 600 meters, about 160 meters southeast of the Industrial Promotion Hall. It is believed that everyone inside the building died instantly. The building was completely burned; only part of the walls and the steel frame of the dome remained. A U.S. military newspaper, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, published a photo on August 6, 1946, saying that the bomb exploded over a "domed building." The booklet titled *Tour of Hiroshima* for the occupation forces referred to it as a "'dome' building." In 1951, the year the Treaty of Peace with Japan was signed, local and national newspapers began posting photos referring to it as "A-Bomb Dome." The City of Hiroshima also called it "A-Bomb Dome" on the tourist map in the 1953 edition of *Shisei Yoran* (an annual report on the outline of the city). In this way, the name "A-Bomb Dome" became widely used.

6-23 Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, severely damaged and burned down by the atomic bomb (September 1945)

Preservation of the Dome

After the war, in 1948, when the Hiroshima Tourism Association conducted a public opinion survey on whether to preserve or demolish the former Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, 436 responses supported preservation and 168 opposed it. Opinions among citizens were mixed: some insisted it should be preserved, while others said it evoked traumatic memories. Mayor Hamai, who led the reconstruction of the city, was initially not in favor of preserving the dome because he didn't think it was worth spending money on.

In August 1960, the Hiroshima Orizuru-no-kai (Paper Crane Club), established by Ichiro Kawamoto, who was helping atomic bomb survivors, and by school children who admired him, erected a signboard in Peace Memorial Park that said "Let's Protect the A-Bomb Dome" and handed out mimeographed leaflets that introduced an excerpt from the diary of Hiroko Kajiyama, who had died of leukemia at the age of 16 in April of that year. She wrote on August 6, 1959, "Only that painful sight of the A-Bomb Dome will forever convey the horror of the atomic bomb."

The small grassroots group raised their voices and continued to call for the preservation of the A-Bomb Dome. Their efforts eventually moved many citizens, and 11 local peace organizations petitioned Mayor Hamai to preserve the A-Bomb Dome permanently. In 1965, the city began to investigate the structural strength of the A-Bomb Dome. Dr. Hideki Yukawa and other prominent people also joined the call to preserve it. On July 11, 1966, the Hiroshima City Council unanimously passed a resolution to preserve the A-Bomb Dome. Following this, Mayor Shinzo Hamai expressed his intention to preserve the dome by funding the costs through donations from both Japan and abroad. The mayor himself stood at Hatcho-bori and at Sukiyabashi Crossing in Tokyo to call for donations.

6-24 Street fundraising for preservation of the A-Bomb Dome (1967)

6-25 A-Bomb Dome undergoing preservation work (1967)

Over 1.3 million people donated a total 66,197,816 yen, which exceeded the target. The preservation work was completed on August 5, 1967.

Since then, preservation work for the A-Bomb Dome has been conducted four times. When preservation work was done for the second time in fiscal 1989, a fundraising campaign was again held to cover the costs and raised a large amount of money.

6-26 B**fore preservation work** (1967)

6-27 After preservation work (1967)

Registration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

In June 1992, three months before Japan ratified the World Heritage Convention and after the Diet approved Japan's membership in the convention, Mayor Takashi Hiraoka conveyed his thoughts at a session of the city council, saying that the A-Bomb Dome should be registered as a World Heritage site. In September, the city council also adopted a statement requesting the registration of the A-Bomb Dome on the World Heritage List. Supported by local organizations and citizens' campaigns to send a petition to the Diet, four years later in 1996, the A-Bomb Dome was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

On September 18, 2025, eighty years after the atomic bombing, the A-Bomb Dome was designated a National Special Historic Site with high scientific value. The designation recognized that the A-Bomb Dome, with its appearance little changed from the time of the bombing, had become a symbol of the devastation caused by the first atomic bomb used in human history. This was the first time the designation was granted to a historic site dating from the Meiji era or later.

The A-Bomb Dome continues to convey the horrors of the atomic bombing and the need to achieve lasting world peace to the many visitors from Japan and abroad.

Toward the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

On March 1, 1954, during a hydrogen bomb test conducted by the United States at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific, the 23 crew members of the Japanese tuna fishing boat, the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* (Lucky Dragon No. 5), were exposed to radioactive fallout ("ashes of death") at about 160 kilometers east of the test site. When the crew's exposure became known upon their return to Yaizu Port in Shizuoka Prefecture 13 days later, protests against atomic and hydrogen bombs surged nationwide, and signatures demanding a ban on atomic and hydrogen bombs exceeded 22 million.

6-28 A papier-mâché representation of a tuna contaminated by radiation, displayed on May Day, in response to the Bikini hydrogen bomb test (May 1, 1954)

The following year, on August 6, 1955, the First World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was held at the Hiroshima City Auditorium, which had been newly completed in Peace Memorial Park. Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama sent a message, and appeals were made by survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as by the wife of the radio operator of the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, who had died from the ashes of death.

6-29 The First World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, held at the newly opened Hiroshima City Auditorium (August 6, 1955)

Through this conference, the presence of atomic bomb survivors and their plight became widely known. Atomic bomb survivors who spoke out gathered at the Second World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, held in Nagasaki City on August 10, 1956, and formed the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo). Its secretariat was located in the City of Hiroshima.

Sit-ins and protest telegrams

Sit-in protests

On March 25, 1957, four atomic bomb survivors began a sit-in in front of the Cenotaph for the A-Bomb Victims in Peace Memorial Park, expressing their resolve to stand with the victims to demand that the United Kingdom stop a planned hydrogen bomb test on Christmas (Kiritimati) Island in the Central Pacific. Citizens began joining them, and since 1973, sit-ins against nuclear tests conducted by any nation continue in front of the cenotaph to this day. Ichiro Moritaki was a pillar of the atomic bomb survivors' movement, and by 1990 he had participated in more than 500 sit-ins.

6-30 Ichiro Moritaki sitting before the cenotaph in protest against a French nuclear test (July 20, 1973)

6-31 Mayor Yamada, participating in a sit-in (August 27, 1973)

Protest telegrams

In August 1968, when France conducted its first hydrogen bomb test at the Fangataufa Atoll in the South Pacific, Mayor Setsuo Yamada and City Council Chairman Yoshimitsu Asao sent a joint protest telegram to French President Charles de Gaulle. Since then, every time a nuclear test is reported, the City of Hiroshima sends a telegram or a letter of protest to the embassy in Japan or to the head of state in the home country.

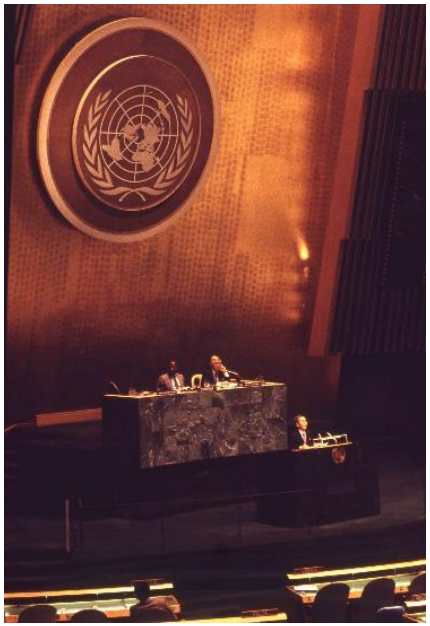
Reaching out to the United Nations

In the 1970s, against the backdrop of the Cold War nuclear arms race, international attention to nuclear disarmament grew rapidly. From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries increased to counter the Soviet nuclear deployment, heightening fears of nuclear war in Europe.

Amid this international situation, Japanese organizations against atomic and hydrogen bombs and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki lobbied the United Nations from 1974 to 1978, calling for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament, and other measures.

In May 1978, the first United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (SSD) was held at the UN Headquarters in New York. It was attended by Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda, Hiroshima Mayor Takeshi Araki, and Nagasaki Mayor Yoshitake Morotani. During the session held from May 23 to June 23, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki A-Bomb Photo Exhibition was held at the UN Headquarters to convey the devastation caused by the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was the first atomic bomb exhibition held at the UN Headquarters building.

At the Second Special Session on Disarmament (SSD II) held in 1982, Mayor Araki delivered his speech as president of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, describing the realities of the atomic bombing and calling for the non-use of nuclear weapons. This became a symbolic event, bringing the voices of atomic bomb survivors to the international forum on nuclear disarmament.



6-32 Mayor Araki (bottom right), delivering his speech at SSD II (June 24, 1982)

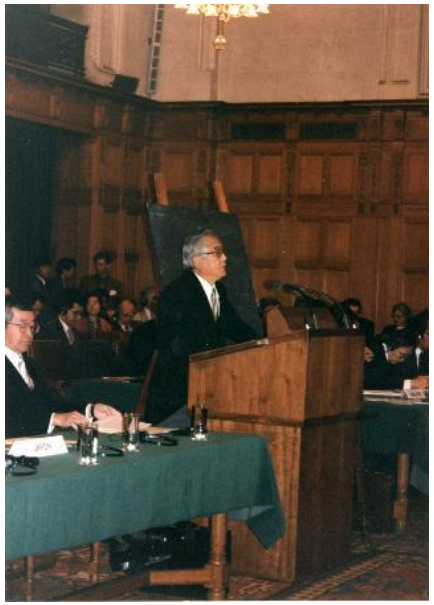
World Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-city Solidarity

In response to Mayor Araki's appeal at SSD II in 1982, the World Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-city Solidarity (today's Mayors for Peace) was established as an organization for cities worldwide to unite across borders to act for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In 1985, its first general conference was jointly organized by Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Representatives of 67 local governments from 22 countries overseas and 33 local governments in Japan participated. Since then, the general conference has been held every four years, alternately hosted by Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As of September 1, 2025, 8,516 cities from 166 countries and regions have joined Mayors for Peace. Under the Vision for Peaceful Transformation for a Sustainable World, Mayors for Peace has adopted three objectives: realize a world without nuclear weapons, realize safe and resilient cities, and promote a culture of peace. As the president city, Hiroshima continues to work with the member cities worldwide under this vision, aiming to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons and lasting world peace.

Oral statement at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

In July 1995, proceedings began at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, regarding the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. In November, the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki appeared before the ICJ as witnesses. Hiroshima Mayor Takashi Hiraoka explicitly stated that the threat and use of nuclear weapons violate international law, citing examples such as the tragedy caused by the atomic bombing, the inhumanity of the indiscriminate killing and injuring of civilians (including people from other countries), and the radiation damage that has continued to this day. He further stated that the development, possession and testing of nuclear weapons are also violations of international law.

On July 8, 1996, the ICJ rendered its advisory opinion, stating that although the ICJ could not "conclude definitely whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence in which the very survival of a State would be at stake," "the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law," and "in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law."

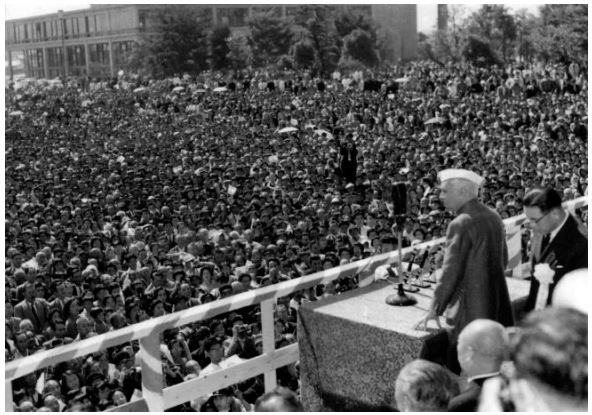


6-33 Mayor Hiraoka delivers his oral statement at ICJ on the illegality of nuclear weapons (November 7, 1995)

Heads of states and prominent people visiting Hiroshima

Many heads of state and prominent people have visited Hiroshima from overseas since the early postwar period.

In 1948, Helen Keller visited. In 1957, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Hiroshima upon his own strong request. This was the first visit to Hiroshima by a foreign head of state. At Peace Memorial Park, 30,000 citizens gathered to welcome him.

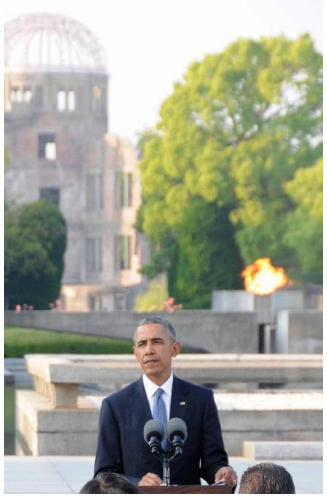


6-34 Indian Prime Minister Nehru speaks to the citizens who gathered. (October 9, 1957)

To date, Che Guevara from Cuba (1959), Pope John Paul II (1981), Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mother Teresa (1984), former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev (1992) and many more have visited Hiroshima. More recently, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Hiroshima in May 2016, and Pope Francis in November 2019. They offered prayers for the victims and saw materials which conveyed the reality of the atomic bombing.

6-35 Pope John Paul II offers a prayer before the cenotaph. (February 24, 1981)

President Obama's visit to Hiroshima was particularly noteworthy as he was the first sitting president of the United States, which dropped the atomic bomb, to visit Hiroshima, and his visit drew attention both within and outside Japan. After laying a wreath at the cenotaph, President Obama stated in his speech that we can choose a future in which “Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening.”



6-36 President Obama delivers a speech before the cenotaph in Peace Memorial Park. (May 19, 2016)

The City of Hiroshima actively invites foreign dignitaries as well as international conferences to the city, hoping that visitors to Hiroshima will learn more about the reality of the atomic bombing and that their visits will help bring about a world without nuclear weapons. In May 2023, Hiroshima hosted the Group of Seven (G7) Hiroshima Summit. At this first G7 Summit held in a city that had suffered an atomic bombing, the G7 leaders and the leaders of the invited countries laid floral wreaths at the cenotaph and visited the Peace Memorial Museum.

6-37 The G7 leaders laid wreaths of flowers. (May 27, 2023)