Testimony of Setsuko Thurlow, an NGO presentation to the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations

October 27, 2008

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Dear members of the First Committee:

On behalf of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I would like to express our deep gratitude for giving us this opportunity, to bring you our message and plea.

On August 6, 1945, my beloved city of Hiroshima was destroyed in a moment, with a brilliant flash of light and thunderous roar under the rising mushroom cloud. People inside were crushed in the rubble of collapsed buildings. And those on the streets outside were burned, blackened, and swollen to an unrecognizable condition. People in the center of the city, like many of my classmates, were simply vaporized.

As a 13-year old student, I was mobilized by the military and located 1.8 km away from the hypocenter. My body was thrown up into the air and was buried under the rubble, from which I was dug out by a stranger. Only then was I able to crawl out of the burning building. Although it happened in the morning, when I escaped the building it was like twilight. Dust and smoke and particles filled the air obscuring the sun over our entire city.

In that darkness I saw a multitude of dead bodies everywhere, and streams and streams of human beings shuffling about slowly. Parts of their bodies were missing, skin and flesh was hanging from their bones, some were holding their eyeballs in their hands, and others had intestines hanging out from their abdomens which had burst open.
Several days later, I started having the eerie experience to witness the latent effects of radiation. People began to develop purple spots all over their bodies, their hair started to fall off, and many started dying slowly. The city I had known had disappeared, instead, I found death and desolation everywhere. By the end of 1945, 140,000 people had died. The horrifying fact is that 63 years later, people are still dying. The average age of survivors today is 75.

A search for the meaning of our survival has generated a fierce commitment to make sure that no other human beings would ever experience what we experienced. For 63 years we have warned the world about the dangers of nuclear weapons. We believe that humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist, and the only way to have security and peace is through the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

We are alarmed that the Conference on Disarmament remains deadlocked after a decade of inaction. We are disillusioned that nuclear weapon states are not fulfilling their disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT, and meanwhile, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has not yet been entered into force. We passionately and most urgently demand that these and other concrete steps be made towards nuclear disarmament. That is to say, we must begin to take action immediately, not 20 years from now or 50 years from now, but to begin from today.

We understand that we live in an inter-connected world. Global climate change, the current economic crisis, severe poverty and diminishing natural resources have an effect on us all. Let us stop squandering our money and brain power on maintaining and continuing to develop the most immoral and destructive instruments of omnicide known to humanity.

As the Russell-Einstein manifesto said: “remember your humanity and forget the rest.”