

WE WILL NEVER FORGET

On Tuesday, September 21, at 9 a.m., I met with over 600 passengers of the Peace Boat, most of them Japanese, including a survivor of the mass murders carried out in Hiroshima; she was two years old when the event occurred.

Cuban national television broadcast the meeting, but since we had no simultaneous interpretation in the Convention Center's conference room, the voices of interpreters, who had the difficult task, overlapped with my words. So I have decided to write a reflection on this subject.

I took advantage of the opportunity to reduce the length of what I expressed and to put my ideas in better order while absolutely maintaining the same contents.

I have kept the full statements of the people who participated in the meeting.

Despite my efforts, the Reflection was long, since the meeting lasted for two and a half hours, so I decided to divide it into three parts, which will be published on consecutive days.

The meeting opened with an address by Kenia Serrano, president of the Cuban Friendship Institute:

Good Morning.

On September 3, the director of the NGO Peace Boat, Mr. Yoshioka Tatsuya, sent our Commander in Chief a letter asking him to meet with the directives of the Peace Boat and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivor who was on board; the Commander in Chief accepted, and with pleasure he also invited a large group of the passengers to the meeting.

We are gathered here today, September 21, a day declared World Peace Day by the United Nations, and of course with the participation of our beloved Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, which is memorable for us. (Applause).

Presiding over our meeting are Mr. Nao Inoue, director of this voyage of the Peace Boat (Applause); Ms. Matsumi Matsumura, also part of the Peace Boat staff, who will help us interpret into Spanish what it is going to be said in this meeting (Applause); Ms. Junko Watanabe, member of the Hibakusha Movement and survivor of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and Professor Susana Garcia, from the University of Havana, who will also facilitate the dialog by interpreting into Japanese as you can see (Applause).

Comandante...

Cmdte.- What, is it my time to give a speech?

Kenia Serrano.- Your greetings, since we all are waiting for that.

Cmdte.- No, I came to give answers, that is the truth. I asked what I should do and was not told anything.

In fact I want, in the first place, to thank you for the honor that this meeting entails.

I was sort of absent as you may know. I read the newspapers; but I have missed many of your meetings although I heard about them later in detail. I have already learned a lot about you: the number of times

you have been in Cuba. You first came in 1990, then you came back in 1995, 1997 and 1998; you came twice in 2000, 2001 and 2002; then again in 2005, 2007 and 2009, and today; so I understand you have made 14 trips.

Well, when I received the invitation, I was happy to exchange views with you due to the significance of the moment we are now living, which is not just any moment. I also had a feeling of gratitude, because I know about your solidarity through the years; the difficulties, the struggle against blockades, the identity and nationality of the boat itself, the harbors that you were allowed or not allowed to visit, if they would provide you with fuel or not, and other stupid things similar to those made by our main adversary, whose methods will never lead to a world of understanding and peace on our planet.

Now as to your slogan, which, in my view has very special value —“Learn from past wars to build a future of peace”—, and will always have meaning, at this moment it is more relevant than ever. I would dare say, without fear of making a mistake, that there was never such a dangerous moment in the history of humanity. So, this is not just a simple trip; it is a real, serious struggle, and this I am saying can be proven. I hope that during our meeting we will discuss ideas and strategies that could be implemented; realistic solutions and not only the simple expression of noble wishes.

This meeting has great significance for me, particularly for the experience you have gained in this issue.

Over the past few days, we marked one more anniversary of that brutal and unwonted event, in which nuclear weapons were launched for the first time on peaceful cities.

What happened in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 was very much remembered around the world. I had just graduated from high school, I remember that. It was summer and I was visiting Santiago de Cuba when we heard the news. Nobody had the slightest idea that such weapons existed, and then, three days later I think, they launched the second atomic bomb.

I can talk more about that later, about the feeling I experienced and the concept I held throughout my life about that event; but this is an example of those things that help raise awareness, because the picture of everything that happened there and the human tragedy inflicted, despite the passing of time, would again move the world public opinion. I do not think that there was anything more revealing of what war really is.

Well, I think I have used up much of your time for my first words, we would like to listen to you. I am willing to answer any questions you want to ask me. I have no secrets of any kind, any subject can be addressed.

I'd like to ask our translator how she has been doing. You, you (laughs and applause).

Intepreter.- Fine, I think, just fine, Comandante.

Cmdte.- Very good.

Kenia Serrano.- Thanks, Comandante.

Mr. Nao Inoue, please.

Nao Inoue.- Good Morning! (exclamations: “Good Morning!”)

First of all, I'd like to express our deepest appreciation for the fact that you welcome us on this occasion.

My name is Nao Inoue, director of Edition 70 of the cruise boat. I want to say some words on behalf of all

Peace Boat members.

It seems you know a lot about our organization. We founded this organization in 1983, more than 27 years ago. We have thus far taken 70 cruises around the world with more than 40,000 Japanese people.

As you know, we have made 14 trips to Cuba and this is a very important year for us, because we mark our 20th anniversary; that is why it has been so important for us to have met you in person, Comandante.

Over the past 20 years, we have made our best efforts to be a bridge between the Cuban and the Japanese people, and we have always rejected the unjust [US] blockade, which is unfair indeed.

We think that it is very important to maintain this bridge, not only between the Cuban and the Japanese people, the two of them, but to also reach out to the other Latin American and Asian countries. The reason we want to work hard in this direction is because we want to build a world of peace, sustainable and led by Cuba. We are now beginning to strengthen friendly relations with Venezuela, Ecuador and Nicaragua. Out of these countries, Cuba is where we have visited the most. We will also meet with Nicaragua's president, Daniel Ortega.

In order to strengthen friendly and fraternal links between the ALBA countries and Japan, we are now implementing a project known as the ALBA Youth Cruise, to which we invite the youths from the ALBA countries to come on board, exchange views, hold forums and lectures, and we would also like to ask you, Comandante, to support this project.

As you said, we are the only nation that was hit by an atomic bomb. As such we believe we have the duty and the mission to spread messages in favor of a world free of nuclear weapons. And we would like to cooperate with you in order to eradicate nuclear weapons.

We also want to say that Japan is a country with a pacifist constitution that renounces war and weapons of mass destruction (SIC).

We also learned about Latin American countries and that they also have a pacifist constitution and prohibit the existence of foreign military bases. We are planning to propose to the United Nations that this organization promotes a pacifist constitution for all countries in the world.

We do not want war ever; we cannot allow the use of nuclear weapons ever. As the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki often say, "We do not want this kind of brutal tragedy to be repeated." We want to build the world and the society in which people want to live; they do not want to live in poverty and that sort of thing. Therefore, we consider it necessary for all the countries to have this kind of Constitution.

We took the compromise to create a world without poverty, without hunger, with much happiness and a sustainable world.

Finally, Comandante, I am a great fan of yours (laughs and applause). It seems that we all are fans of you.

We know that you are very busy, but we want to invite you on board to sail to Nicaragua. What do you say? (Applause). What do you think about that? (Applause).

Cmdte.- Marvellous! (Applause).

Nao Inoue.- I will conclude my words with this invitation. Thank you very much (Applause).

Cmdte.- It won't be during the hurricane season, will it? (laughs).

I was told that you were to arrive yesterday, but there were some storms in the Atlantic. Finally, at what time did you arrive?

Nao Inoue.- We arrived at 5:00 in the morning.

Cmdte.- And how fast does the Peace Boat go? (laughs)

Nao Inoue.- More or less like a fast bicycle (laughs).

Cmdte.- Well, it depends, I think that world champion cycles can reach over 60 kilometers per hour (laughs).

I think that in our times the Peace Boat must run faster; it is more urgent now to travel around the world (Applause).

I should also apologize. Yesterday morning I heard the news. I thought about how I would meet with you, since I was told that I had been asked to meet with some of you. Then I thought, "If possible, I will try to greet all of them," I did not know, however, what time you would arrive and since I knew that you had a schedule planned for the whole day and I did not want to interfere with the plans of any other institution or program, we decided to have this meeting so early in the morning. We all have had to wake up early. I imagine that you might have been...I don't know where you might have been, if you were on board the ship looking at the entrance Havana or if you were sleeping. I beg you to excuse me for that, because I am guilty for you having had to expand your program (Applause). Then we organized, or more precisely, we improvised this meeting at this time so that you were able to attend your activities and to avoid me ruining my relations with the institutions that will welcome you.

I think they gave us one and a half hour. I answered that in the end you were expected to arrive today, but were now to arrive tomorrow, so, it is a flexible issue. I think the boat was expected to sail out today at 5:00 pm.

Kenia Serrano.- Boarding would start at 5:00 and the boat would sail out at 7:00.

Cmdte.- So, was it expected to sail out at 7:00?

Kenia Serrano.- That's correct.

Cmdte.- Right, you were to conclude your activities at 5:00.

Well, if a storm forced the delay of the boat, if you leave at 9:00 or at 10:00, then you would stay some more time in Havana, it is not a tragedy anyway. Fortunately, the visit did not take place under war. It has happened in peace time.

I extend my apologies for that.

Do you have any idea of how this will take place?

Kenia Serrano.- Comandante, this is a very moving event, every time the cruise ship comes —last year and now— it brings survivors of Hiroshima, and now we have Ms. Junko Watanabe with us. I propose we listen to her testimony.

Junko Watanabe.- First, Commander Fidel Castro, it is a great honor and also a great pleasure to meet you; I'd like to express my deep appreciation for having welcomed us with so much love.

I would also like to thank you for your great the interest and knowledge the Cuban people show about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Furthermore, just yesterday, the Movement for Peace in Cuba held a meeting with me about my experiences and a ceremony for International Peace Day; we also had a nice meeting at the Friendship Center.

I was born in Hiroshima and later I married a Japanese man and went to live in Brazil. I went to Brazil at the age of 25. I returned to Japan when I was 38 years old. And at that point in time, for the first time, I understood that I was a survivor of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I was born in downtown Hiroshima, but during the Second World War our family had been evacuated from Hiroshima, and since I only was two years old I can't remember; though when I my parents told me that I was a survivor, I was really shocked.

On August 6, 1945, at 8:15, my mom was at home with my younger brother. My elder brother and I were playing in the yard of a temple near my home. Then, my mother felt a strong wind, a terrible wind, and she saw burnt papers falling in front of our home. My mom was surprised and she came to get us at the temple. At that moment the black rain began. The rain was black and sticky.

Before the bomb was launched that August 6, the weather was nice in the morning, and they say that the atomic bomb exploded 580 meters above.

Cmdte.- How many meters?

Junko Watanabe.- Five hundred and eighty meters above the earth.

Cmdte.- It was a nuclear bomb.

Junko Watanabe.- A nuclear bomb.

Cmdte.- That was the energy of uranium, not of plutonium. The plutonium one was launched on another city.

Junko Watanabe.- Yes, on Nagasaki.

Then, since it explodes high above, it does more damage with its hot rays and hot wind, which burn people. After the bomb exploded, all the dust and papers flew upwards and then came the black rain with radiation.

After being exposed to the black rain my body had this condition.

Cmdte.- How's that, can you explain?

Junko Watanabe.- My body was damaged, I will explain its condition now.

I suffered from diarrhea every day. I could eat, but no nutrients remain in my body, they all were lost, everything that I ate. My parents thought their daughter would die.

In fact I was only two years old, and I cannot recall any disastrous scenes.

When I turned 60, I joined an association in Brazil. At present, 132 survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are living in Brazil.

Cmdte.- Where, in Brazil?

Junko Watanabe.- In Brazil.

Cmdte.- Were they kids when they went to Brazil?

Junko Watanabe.- Of different ages.

Cmdte.- Did their parents go with them?

Junko Watanabe.- Most of them got married and went there as adults, without their parents.

At present the average age of these survivors is 75, they are getting old. That is why the president of the Association in Brazil asked her to help the association because she is a young survivor.

Although I am a survivor, because I could not remember anything, I did not know anything about the atomic bomb before I joined the association.

Later I had the opportunity to read all the documents written by 200 survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who lived in Brazil. They wrote about what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

That was the first time I knew about the reality of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. They described the very brutal scene.

Sadness and resentment made me feel very unhappy and I felt that I was shaking.

I also found a documentary with images, filmed by a Japanese journalist. However, after the atomic bomb, US academicians stole this information and took it to their country. They were never going to show us this video I found in the office.

It has been somewhat difficult to watch it because it is an old tape. So, I asked a friend to turn it into a DVD.

We and 10 survivors, friends of ours, saw the film.

The scenes in the documentary are too brutal and I watch it with much sadness; the city of Hiroshima was disappearing.

We saw that in the documentary, we saw how the buildings were all burnt and the city was completely black. There were also the people, who seemed to walk unconsciously; skin hanging from their arms because it had deteriorated; their eyes falling out of their sockets. People walked, but unconsciously.

When I saw that documentary, although I could not recall that event, I understood I was there at that moment and I also understood that such a thing was done by human beings; then I felt strong resentment and sadness.

Then I came up with this idea. We have to tell those testimonies to other generations, and two years ago, in 2008, I participated in the Hibakusha Project undertaken by the Peace Boat Organization. With 100 survivors on board, we travelled and gave our testimonies in every port; I also met other Hibakushas around the world.

In Viet Nam, we met the victims of Agent Orange, from the Viet Nam war, we learned about what they and their parents had gone through. The effect on their bodies is transmitted from generation to generation.

My older brother, who was playing at the temple, died two years ago at the age of 67.

After being submitted to the black rain, as I was, he had weak bones and became very weak. He died at

age 67 from liver cancer.

Now that I see the survivors dying, I am very concerned about my health.

I would also like to tell you about the story of Origami, the crane figures made from paper. They represent a symbol of peace for us and now for the world. They accompany the story of a young girl, named Sadako Sasaki, who died from leukemia at the age of 12.

This year, when I attended the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Conference held in New York in May, I had the opportunity to meet Sadako Sasaki's brother.

Let me tell you a little about the story of Sadako Sasaki. Like me, she was hit by the black rain. She grew up healthy until she turned 10. Then, she became ill and was hospitalized; she was never able to leave hospital.

She believed that if she could make 1,000 paper cranes, she would get better and, according to the story told by her brother, she kept making cranes until...Well, at that time there was no paper. She received her medications wrapped in paper, so she would use that paper, folding it by using needles. Up until her last moment, she would always say: "I want to live more, I want to live more."

We are now in the same situation of Sadako Sasaki. We were hit by the black rain at the early age of two. She is dead and I still survive. Therefore, I feel this great responsibility of explaining what the atomic bomb is and who the survivors are. Survivors have to live with many physical problems and mental preoccupations until they die, and we had to tell this to other generations.

We learned that there are different kinds of Hibakushas around the world, in several places. For instance, the indigenous people who extracted uranium from the mines are very affected by the radiation; the people who live near nuclear plants too, and we have to learn these things to educate people.

When I participated in the Hibakusha Project two years ago, there was this Japanese man, the director of the documentary film, who discovered that I was on board. He later also interviewed my father, who is 98 years old. What my father told him I had not previously known. My father said the following. The director asked my dad; "Why didn't you tell Junko the truth?"

From the bomb up until now, the young girls who were affected by the atomic bomb, although they are survivors, they have been discriminated against and have had difficulties trying to marry. Then, we recognized that I, being a survivor, have fortunately had no physical problems, although there are many doctors who say that the affect of the radiation also shows up in future generations.

To be continued tomorrow.

Fidel Castro Ruz
September 24, 2010
3:38 p.m.

Date:

24/09/2010

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.comandante.biz>)

Source URL: <http://www.comandante.biz/en/articulos/we-will-never-forget?height=600&width=600>