



Women and Life on Earth: Voices of Women Series



Satomi Oba

„Japan Summer 2004“

Non-proliferation and Disarmament; Keep Space for Peace;
Nuclear Energy; Peace education; Women and Peace

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Wouldn't it be great if there was a way to discover and share information, resources and action strategies internationally, as we work towards the „other world“ we know is possible?

Since 1999 an international internet-networking project has been in development, with that goal. Its name, Women and Life on Earth, comes from the 1980-82 northeast-USA regional ecofeminist group, which organized an „Ecofeminism in the 1980's“ conference and the Women's Pentagon Action, where 2,000 women surrounded the Pentagon demanding: „no more amazing inventions for death“. The new effort now based in Berlin, Germany, with a regional group in the US southwest, has an active office center, international advisory board and contacts world-wide.

Take a look at our model website, <http://womenandlife.org>, currently on-line in four languages, with more to come. Besides the website we will offer publications such as this “Voices of Women” series (also available on the website), speakers and international networking support. The project has grown thus far with volunteer labor and contributions. With your participation and support we can expand with current and background information, action alerts, calendar listings and more – by women for everyone – as we work for peace, ecological health and global justice.

Please contact us to contribute or link to our site, make a financial contribution, or receive our periodic e-newsletter.



"Women in the Phases of the Moon" © Bonnie Acker 1980

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Satomi Oba and Keep Space for Peace demonstration: courtesy Satomi Oba.
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Japan Summer 2004

In this timely report, Satomi Oba gives a personal overview of current issues in her native Japan, concerning nuclear weapons and power, the international campaign to halt the militarization of space, and citizen action for peace. A long-time anti-nuclear activist with particular concerns for human rights and justice, Satomi Oba is Director of Plutonium Action Hiroshima, Hiroshima, Japan. She is a regional activist involved with "Abolition 2000" and other regional and international coalitions and efforts – and also an English teacher. And a member of the international advisory board of Women and Life on Earth.

Non-proliferation and Disarmament

After coming back from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty PrepCom meeting in New York City in April – May, I was asked by some newspaper writers for interviews and was invited to speak about non-proliferation and disarmament issues. Media attention is increasing because next year is the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

There are disappointing facts today. The traditional nuclear weapons states have not kept their promises to disarm. Nuclear weapons are spreading to South Asia and the Middle East. The United States is developing more usable mini-nukes, and weapons in space.

In Japan, the groups that invite me are usually small, with around two dozen people in the audience. Most are women who are deeply concerned with the current world situation, one without security. They are also angry at the Japanese government, the lapdog of the Bush administration.

The Global Network for Nuclear Abolition, "Abolition 2000", and the "Emergency Campaign of Mayors for Peace" decided to launch the new campaign "Abolition Now!" To let people know about these campaigns, we of Plutonium Action Hiroshima produced 1000 postcard sets of A-Bomb Dome photos, showing the skeletal remains of a building left standing as a memorial. Mayor Akiba of Hiroshima City is president of Mayors for Peace, and Mayor Ito of Nagasaki City is vice-president.

At the end of June I was invited to speak to 200 students at Kyushu University, for the second year in a row. The students were especially interested in the lecture on how youth can help create a peaceful world without war and nuclear weapons, and wrote splendid reports.

In July and August, I worked as a translator for A-bomb survivors at two workshops of Catholic nuns visiting Hiroshima from around the world. One of the survivors was an old Korean man – many Koreans lived in Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the A-bomb was dropped - and the other was a Japanese woman. Both told moving stories. The nuns are very serious about peace issues, and I was touched with their dedication, too.

I witnessed many events taking place around August 6. More people, young and old, especially women, seem to be worrying about war and occupation in Iraq, or the total swing to the right, including Japanese leaders' attempts to revise the Japanese constitution, to exclude the Article 9 renouncing war forever, and maintain the prohibition of military force. But in fact, the Japanese Self Defense Forces are among the most powerful military forces in the world. People are becoming more active, although not as active as in Europe.

I attended a large symposium held by the Asahi newspaper company and the Hiroshima Peace and Culture Foundation. One of the panelists was my good friend from New York Dr. Kathleen Sullivan, an independent educator on disarmament and non-proliferation. She organized a youth forum as an official program at the UN during the NPT PrepCom in May. There were four speakers, and the moderator was a well-known TV news broadcaster. To tell the truth, Kathleen was the only real abolitionist; the others were not clear if they wished to abolish nuclear weapons. One of them, a young Japanese academic, even supported the Bush administration. I was not so surprised to see this, as I have seen such speakers often in disarmament conferences or symposia in Japan, but it was still frustrating.

The next day, on August 2nd, some of us in the grassroots peace movement held an exchange meeting with Dr. Sullivan. Although we were fewer than 20 people, including students, school teachers, journalists and housewives, it was a creative and fruitful meeting.

I was not at the ceremony on the morning of August 6, but watched it at home on TV. The Mayor's declaration was excellent, according to all who heard it. But the speech by the Prime Minister Koizumi that followed received no applause at all. We no longer see the high popularity that Koizumi gained in his initial days as Prime Minister. There were a lot of rallies, conferences, marches and protest actions, including an anti-nuclear power plant sit-in at the Electric Power Company. But most impressive to me was the peace walk from Australia to Nagasaki, Japan. The group of some 70 walkers included two aboriginal people. Most walkers were non-Japanese, but the march was organized by a young Japanese woman, Atsuko Nogawa. They left from a major uranium mine in Australia last December, arriving in Japan in April 2004. Opposing the nuclear chain from uranium mining to waste dumps, they walked through Japan, visiting nuclear facilities from Hokkaido to Aomori, Tokaimura and Fukui. On August 3 they marched into Hiroshima in the scorching heat.

I met them on the evening of August 6. Although they had come from so far, having done such a great work in warning of nuclear dangers, they received too little attention. I gave them our postcards to express my thanks to them all for their action and commitment.

I became friends with some active and creative young people this summer. In Japan there was a long spell without involvement of youth in the peace movement. This summer I saw some changes among them. On the evening of August 6 there was a beautiful event with a thousand colorful lanterns floating on the river. A youth group hosted a ceremony themselves near the A-dome, and lit the lanterns during the music and prayer of the indigenous people from the pilgrimage from Australia. Kathleen was asked to give a speech at the ceremony, which I translated.

These events were not only for the abolition of nuclear weapons, but to protest the war and occupation of Iraq. I attended a meeting held by Amnesty International on August 5. Two Iraqis were invited to speak, and when I entered a woman journalist was talking. She described how citizens have suffered from the violence there, especially after the bombing and start of the occupation, and also how true information is withheld.

On August 8 I was asked to translate for an Iraqi medical doctor at a workshop of the teachers' union in Hiroshima. The audience seemed to be shocked about the terrible situation of the Iraqi people, especially when seeing photos of the children in pain, suffering from many kinds of cancers or severe birth defects. Dr. Hussam Salih, who is researching on medical care for leukaemia victims at Hiroshima University Hospital, told

us that 5,000 children died in a month after the Gulf War in 1991, and how the symptoms or diseases such as cancer were abnormalities never seen before then. The last slide he showed was of an oil company building, the only major building that escaped being bombed.

Keep Space for Peace

I wanted to organize some action to oppose the US missile defence system, and Theater Missile Defence (TMD), one part of it, but was not able to do so. I only called for an action during “Keep Space for Peace Week” from September 25 to October 2. This is an annual event coordinated by the “Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space” based in Maine, US. (see <http://www.space4peace.org>)

As the Bush administration deploys one interceptor in Alaska, and plans to deploy them in California before the Presidential election, GN encourages their network of groups in the world to take action. The Bush administration also plans to deploy an Aegis warship in the Japan Sea in September. In the middle of August one of the citizens groups in Tokyo alerted us to the visit of the US Aegis cruiser Cowpens, based in Yokosuka, to the Niigata Port for recreation. We sent letters to the Governor of Niigata Prefecture urging him not to approve the visit, and to the governors’ conference that happened to be convening in Niigata City on August 18-19. The US Navy gave up their plan to visit in Niigata, saying it was because the typhoon was coming. Instead the ship visited Shizuoka. It was only a small and temporary action, but I hope was nevertheless something effective to get some media attention, as very few know what Aegis is, or TMD.

We plan to do a street action at the dome memorial on September 11 for the “Keep Space for Peace” campaign, although I don’t expect that a large number will participate.

Nuclear Energy

August is a painful month for me, not only because the memories of the atomic bomb survivors are too painful, but also because too little attention is paid to our own nuclear problems: nuclear power plants, uranium enrichment, reprocessing, fast breeder reactors, and waste repository.

It was ironic that the worst accident at a nuclear facility in Japan took place this summer on Nagasaki Day. In the evening of August 9, I heard that an accident had happened at Mihama-3 nuclear power plant, and that four workers had died from the high temperature steam that had burst from the secondary coolant circuit pipe. Another worker died later, bringing the number of victims to five.

I was busy collecting information and writing to overseas activists who wanted to know the details. It was a very serious accident in which more than 800 tons of coolant (75% or more) was lost, which could have led to a radioactive fuel melt-down as in the 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania USA. The media reported that there had been no checks or replacement of the pipe for 28 years after start-up. The operator of Mihama NPP is Kepco. Based in Osaka, it is the second largest utility in Japan. Its dismal record includes the former steam generator accident at Mihama-2 in 1991. KEPCO plans to promote MOX fuel utilization at the other reactors. But the governor of the Fukui Prefecture gave the initial approval of the contract on Mox fuel fabrication to the French contractor Cogema.

There are more plans for MOX at nuclear power stations in Kyushu and Shikoku Islands. Residents are strengthening their opposition to the unsafe project, collecting signatures on a petition to stop it.

in January this year I started up the Japanese version of the World Information Service on Energy/Nuclear Information and Resource Service (WISE/NIRS) Nuclear Monitor. This is a bimonthly Japanese newsletter with translations of articles from the English publication. It still needs more subscribers, but we need it in Japan, as it contains very important and useful information, for example on the problems of the International Thermal Experimental Reactor (ITER), the European Pressurized Reactor to be built in Finland, etc.

Peace education

Dr. Kathleen Sullivan made a powerful impression on the Japanese students and educators she met this summer. Her method was creative and interactive, far different from the traditional method in Japanese schools. But she said her first teachers were Hibakusha (A-bomb survivors.).

In late July I met a Pakistani visiting Hiroshima. He is director of the project for a peace and human rights museum for children in Pakistan. He came to Japan to look at museums in Osaka, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We talked only for an hour, but I was deeply impressed with the project. The museum is scheduled to open in Karachi in March 2004. I can imagine how hard it is to carry out such a project with minimal funding and under a military government. I hope the project will be successful, and will try to support them by sending materials. (see: <http://www.hrep.com.pk>)

Women and Peace

One of my most memorable experiences this summer was a workshop in a small town in Hiroshima Prefecture in late July. I was invited to speak about "Women and War" with a group in their community hall. I hesitated, as I had never been to countries such as Iraq or Palestine. But the organizer asked me to speak, saying that the group was eager for access to "true" information *that seems to be hidden behind the mainstream coverage. The audience was about 40-50 men and women. Usually the atmosphere in the countryside is conservative, but I was surprised and moved at their passionate attitude while I was speaking. I used some of the information from Women and Life on Earth, about Palestine and "another tragedy on September 11, 2001."

Translation

Since March this year a friend and I have been working on the translation of the book, "Peace is Possible", edited by Fredrik Heffermehl, published by International Peace Bureau in 2000. (<http://www.peaceispossible.info>). The Japanese version will be published by a respected publisher in November.

Meanwhile, my computer had serious problems during summer, and it was not easy to work with it. Now it has been fixed, and I could publish the fourth issue of the Japanese version of WISE /NIRS Nuclear Monitor in July, and another newsletter "Seeds of Hope" in August.

This autumn I am preparing for a trip to Europe, to Linz, Austria from October 1-4 and to Helsinki, Finland from October 5-8. In Linz there will be an international symposium "the Lie of the Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy," a follow-up for last year's gathering there. This trip will be important for me, especially for the European pressurized reactor Olkiluoto-3, designed by a French-German company and joined by Mitsubishi Heavy Industry Inc. It is said to be the world's largest reactor. If built, the Finnish people will become the guinea pigs for this new type reactor. &