



## Testimonies

Section 6 [www.AtomicBombMuseum.org/6\\_5.shtml](http://www.AtomicBombMuseum.org/6_5.shtml)

### Appeal for Peace

**Pope John Paul II**

**Peace Memorial Hall, 25 February 1981**

*War is the work of man.  
War is destruction of human life.  
War is death.*

Nowhere do these truths impose themselves upon us more forcefully than in this city of Hiroshima, at this Peace Memorial. Two cities will forever have their names linked together, two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as the only cities in the world that have had the ill fortune to be a reminder that man is capable of destruction beyond belief. Their names will forever stand out as the names of the only cities in our time that have been singled out as a warning to future generations that war can destroy human efforts to build a world of peace.



\*Pope John Paul II addresses a gathering in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, February 25, 1981.

Mr. Mayor, dear friends here present, and all of you who are listening to my voice, and whom my message will reach:

It is with deep emotion that I have come here today as a pilgrim of peace. I wanted to make this visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial out of a deep personal conviction that to remember the past is to commit oneself to the future.

Together we recall that it is one of humanity's sad achievements that all across the face of the earth the names of very many – too many – places are remembered mainly because they have witnessed the horror and suffering

produced by war: war-memorials, that with the victory of one side also recall the suffering and death of countless human beings; cemeteries where rest those who sacrificed their very lives in the service of their country or in the service of a noble cause, and cemeteries where lie the innocent civilian victims of war's destructive fury; the remains of concentration and extermination camps, where contempt for man and for his inviolable rights reached its most base and cruel expression; battlefields, where nature has mercifully healed the earth's scars, but without being able to blot out past human history of hate and enmity. Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand out from all those other places and monuments, as the first victims of nuclear war.

I bow my head as I recall the memory of thousands of men, women and children who lost their lives in that one terrible moment, or who for long years carried in their bodies and minds those seeds of death which inexorably pursued their process of destruction. The final balance of the human suffering that began here has not been fully drawn up, nor has the total human cost been tallied, especially when one sees what nuclear war has done – and could still do – to our ideas, our attitudes and our civilization.



**\*Memorial Mound: HIMAT. 08.** Here lie in rest the countless unidentified souls (estimated at 70,000) whose names are not known. Photo credit: J. Levin.

To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. I cannot but honor and applaud the wise decision of the authorities of this city that the memorial recalling the first nuclear bombing should be a monument to peace. By so doing, the City of Hiroshima and the whole People of Japan have forcefully expressed their hope for a peaceful world and their conviction that man who wages war can also successfully make peace. From this city, and from the event its name recalls, there has originated a new worldwide consciousness against war, and a fresh determination to work for peace.

Some people, even among those who were alive at the time of the events that we commemorate today, might prefer not to think about the horror of nuclear war and its dire consequences. Among those who have never personally experienced the reality of armed conflict between nations, some might wish to abandon the very possibility of nuclear war. Others might wish to regard nuclear capacity as an unavoidable means of maintaining a balance of power through a balance of terror. But there is no justification for not raising the question of the responsibility of each nation and each individual in the face of possible wars and of the nuclear threat.

To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. I evoke before you the memory of August 6, 1945, so that we may better grasp the meaning of the present challenge. Since that fateful day, nuclear stockpiles have grown in quantity and in destructive power. Nuclear weaponry continues to be built, tested and deployed. The total consequences of full-scale nuclear war are impossible to predict, but even if a mere fraction of the available weapons were to be used, one has to ask when the inevitable escalation can be imagined, and whether the very destruction of humanity is not a real possibility. I wish to repeat here what I said to the United Nations General Assembly: "The continual preparations for war demonstrated by the production of ever more numerous, powerful and sophisticated weapons in various countries show that there is a desire to be ready for war, and being ready means being able to start it; it also means taking the risk that sometime, somewhere, somehow, someone can set in motion the terrible mechanism of general destruction."

To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace. To remember what the people of this city suffered is to renew our faith in man, in his capacity to do what is good, in his freedom to choose what is right, in his determination to turn disaster into a new beginning. In the face of the man-made calamity that ever war is, one must affirm and reaffirm, again and again, that the waging of war is not inevitable or unchangeable. Humanity is not destined to self-destruction. Clashes of ideologies, aspirations and needs can and must be settled and resolved by means other than war and violence. Humanity owes it to itself to settle differences and conflicts by peaceful means. The great spectrum of problems facing the many peoples in varying stages of cultural, social, economic and political development gives rise to international tension and conflict. It is vital for humanity that these problems should be solved in accordance with the ethical principles of equity and justice enshrined in meaningful agreements and institutions. The international community should thus give itself a system of law that will regulate international relations and maintain peace, just as the rule of law protects national order.

Those who cherish life on earth must encourage governments and decision-makers in the economic and social fields to act in harmony with the demands of peace rather than out of narrow self-interest. Peace must always be the aim: peace pursued and protected in all circumstances. Let us not repeat the past, a past of violence and destruction. Let us embark upon the steep and difficult path of peace, the only path that befits human dignity, the only path that leads to the true fulfillment of the human destiny, the only path to a future in which equity, justice and solidarity are realities and not just distant dreams.

And so, on this very spot where, 35 years ago, the life of so many people was snuffed out in one fiery moment, I wish to appeal to the whole world on behalf of life, on behalf of humanity, on behalf of the future.

To the Heads of State and of Government, to those who hold political and economic power, I say: let us pledge ourselves to peace through justice; let us take a solemn decision, now, that war will never be tolerated or sought as a means of resolving differences; let us promise our fellow human beings that we will work untiringly for disarmament and the banishing of all nuclear weapons; Pope John Paul: let us replace violence and hate with confidence and caring.

To every man and woman in this land and in the world, I say: let us assume responsibility for each other and for the future without being limited by frontiers and social distinctions; let us educate ourselves and educate others in the ways of peace; let humanity never become the victim of a struggle between competing systems; let there never be another war.

To young people everywhere, I say: let us together create a new future of fraternity and solidarity; let us reach out towards our brothers and sisters in need, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, free the downtrodden, bring justice where injustice reigns and peace where only weapons speak. Your young hearts have an extraordinary capacity for goodness and love; put them at the service of your fellow human beings.

To everyone I repeat the words of the Prophet: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is 2:4).

To those who believe in God, I say: let us be strong in his strength that infinitely surpasses our own; let us be united in the knowledge that he calls us to unity; let us be aware that love and sharing are not faraway ideals but the road to enduring peace – the peace of God.

And to the Creator of nature and man, of truth and beauty I pray:

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victims of all wars and violence among individuals and nations;

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of all children who suffer and will suffer when people put their faith in weapons and war;

Hear my voice when I beg you to instill into the hearts of all human beings the wisdom of peace, the strength of justice and the joy of fellowship;

Hear my voice, for I speak for the multitudes in every country and in every period of history who do not want war and are ready to walk the road of peace;

Hear my voice and grant insight and strength so that we may always respond to hatred with love, to injustice with total dedication to justice, to need with the sharing of self, to war with peace.

O God, hear my voice and grant unto the world your everlasting peace.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial  
25 February 1981

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