

Brooke Sadler Follow-up Report on Hiroshima Youth Exchange Program

This youth exchange program for NDPI in Hiroshima was a once in a life time experience for me, and helped me realize how youth are an important part in this problem.

Unlike a few other teen representatives from the program, I wasn't taking classes in peace studies, or studying nuclear weapons in college. So, I'd learned about the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and did have a fear of the threats from North Korea, but as a normal high-schooler in Japan, this never seemed to me as a big problem. It wasn't that I wasn't scared of atomic weapons, but they didn't feel like something real to me.

This was my first trip to Hiroshima, and from the second I stepped out of the train station I was blown away by how different it was from anywhere I've been, with all the beautiful trees and the wide roads and parks. It's amazing to think they built up this much in 69 years since the terrible tragedy.

For our first day of the youth exchange program we visited a few places and gave a tribute of flowers at the peace memorial park, then attended a couple dialogs on nuclear weapons as audience. It definitely had a big impact on me, hearing the story of a survivor Mr. Tuboi and how he still has to struggle with the effects of the bomb. One of the speakers said "there are no winners when atomic bombs are used" and these words really stuck with me, and I felt that it's important to throw away the mind-set thinking "it's safer and okay to hold on to nuclear weapons". Through day one, I learned how it is our mission as teenagers to share the message of the survivors and how inhuman atomic bombs are, and pass it on to the next generation so that this terrible tragedy won't happen again.

For our second day which was the last day of the youth exchange, we visited the actual dome, memorial museum, heard another testimony of a survivor, and had our group discussion. The atomic bomb dome and peace memorial museum were both very moving, and I was especially shocked seeing the dolls that re-created what the people looked like right after the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. The testimony by Ms. Ogura spoke to me again of how inhuman atomic bombs and nuclear weapons are, and many things were shocking, because we didn't learn that deeply about the bombing in our textbooks. Overall it gave me more understanding on how terrible nuclear weapons are. Our last and most important event of the exchange program was the group discussion, where each country gave a four minute speech, and shared our opinions in groups. Our topic was what each country does for NDPI, and what youth can do for this, and through this discussion I got some answers to my question on how I was to share the nuclear message to the next generation. I think it's important to learn more about these issues first, and I can start by sharing these things even with my friends at school. I also think that discussing and talking about the issue like this youth exchange is important because it reminds us how important and urgent this issue is.

This exchange definitely changed my view on nuclear weapons, and gave me an interest on something I had not really given thought to so much before. I would like to continue to remember this experience, and share this message to people my age in Japan and Canada.