

Hideko Matsuya: Seeking Official Recognition as a Nagasaki *Hibakusha*

On August 9th, 54 years ago, I suffered the A-bomb explosion while standing on the open porch of my house located 2.45 kilometers from the blast center in Nagasaki City.

I was three and half years old then. I was affected by enormous blast, heat rays and radiation. I was hit in the head by a roof tile blown off by the blast. The open wound in the head continued to discharge pus that smelled like rotten fish. It took about two and a half years before the wound finally closed. It was not until I was at age 6 that I started to practice to walk, wearing straw sandals.

Because I could not walk well, I had to delay my entrance to a primary school for one year. There are many slopes in Nagasaki. I had to go up as many as 107 steps to reach my school. On fine days, my sister led me by the hand. On rainy days, my mother carried me on her back to go to school. I often felt pained and sad when children jeered at me about my crippled body saying "Why do I have to be so bullied only because of the A-bombing?"

In class, I sometimes had headaches and convulsive fits. Only after I became a sixth grader, I managed to go to school by myself. Convulsions continued to happen even when I was a junior high school student.

Worrying about my future, my mother advised me to study abacus. It was very hard for me to master it. My right hand is useless in abacus. I failed in a licensing examination many times. My mother encouraged me every time I failed. When I was in the second year of senior high school, I finally passed the Grade 2 exam on abacus. Using this qualification, after I graduated from high school, I got a job as a treasurer in the Nagasaki Council of A-bomb Sufferers.

I cannot raise my right arm any higher than my shoulder. My fingers are too deformed to pick up a handkerchief or paper. As I always use my left arm, the size of it is about two times bigger than that of my right arm. When I pare an apple, I cut it into four pieces first. Putting it on the right hand and holding it against my belly, I pare it by using my left hand. It is dangerous if I miss my aim.

When I cut my fingernails of my left hand, I have my right hand hold a razor and move my left hand. I sometimes injure my fingers.



Hideko Matsuya addresses the conference. Norio Kebeili is to her left. *Photo: Lin Yi Hsing*

I have to put up with inconvenience and danger in doing daily labor, such as tying the strings, opening a bottle or hanging the washed clothes for drying.

My right leg is also deformed. The heel does not reach the ground. As the big toe and the foretoe rise, only the remaining three toes touch the ground. As I have to support myself only with the three toes and the sole of my foot, the skin of these parts were hardened and caused piercing pain to me. The deformation of my leg has become worse as time goes by. My shoes are order-made, the right one of which has a thicker sole. Recently it is getting harder for me to walk, so I use a wheelchair when I go out to appeal for support for my trial. This time I brought a wheelchair here from Japan.

When I was young, some people offered a marriage plan and at one time I had someone that I loved. But I gave up such hope, being afraid that my married life might not go well because I was a *Hibakusha* and disabled.

In my dreams, I often walk smart on red high heel shoes. But every time, I wake up to face harsh reality and misery. I hate the atomic bomb that has inflicted so much pain on my heart and body and spoiled my life. I can never condone my government and the Ministry of Health and Welfare that categorically denied the causation between my health condition and the effects of radiation, even without looking at my body.

I need to get the recognition as an A-bomb disease patient in order to receive adequate treatment without feeling insecure about my living.

Due to the porencephalia caused by the head injury and effects of radiation I sustained at the time of the A-bombing, I have been suffering for 54 years from the paralysis on the right side of my body. I applied to the Ministry of Health for my condition to be recognized as an A-bomb-induced disease. The Ministry, however, rejected my application and I gave it up, swallowing an insult.

Ten years after that, my mother made the second application for me, worrying about my life after she died and hoping that I would be recognized as A-bomb disease patient while she was alive. I attached a photo of myself in a slip to show my real figure. But without changing its attitude, the ministry again turned down my application.

I could not be patient with the cold treatment the ministry had given to me twice. Initially I thought that suing the state would be an absurd idea. But encouraged by my mother's words, "Hideko, you are not the only one who is suffering", I made up my mind to do so and filed a lawsuit against the Health Minister in September 1988.

In the first trial at the Nagasaki District Court and the second at the Fukuoka High Court, victorious judgments were handed down. Both courts ruled that my claim should be totally accepted and my condition recognized as having A-bomb diseases. However, refusing to accept the ruling, the State appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that the damage of the atomic bombs must be endured as the damage caused during the wartime.

It was the good-will support of the Japanese people that led me to the victorious judgments achieved twice from the Nagasaki District Court and the Fukuoka High Court. I have experienced various things during the 11-year court battle. My mother, who was always encouraging me, died without hearing of the victorious judgment from the district court. I have gone through many difficulties and hard times with repeated hospitalization and operation.

Since I was a child, I had been so shy because of my handicap, that I was able to speak only with my close friends. But through the court struggle, I have met many peace-loving people not only in Japan but in other countries of the world like you all here today, which has given me a great joy to live. For me, now is the prime time of my life.

I feel mortified that I have to continue this struggle in the Supreme Court. We feel angry at the government that refuses to understand my pain and hardship over the last 54 years. Turning my anger into the energy for further advancement of the struggle, I will strive to obtain the third victory from the Supreme Court. I will continue to struggle until the judges will accept the wishes of not only me but all the Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who have not had real peace of mind since that day of August 1945.

Friends, I hope you will understand the damage caused by nuclear weapons, which persists as long as we live.

Hideko Matsuya is a Nagasaki A-bomb Survivor and the Plaintiff of Nagasaki A-Bomb Matsuya Lawsuit