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NEWS

IN-DEPTH

INTERACT

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Hiroshima mayor chastises U.S. for developing small nukes

Friday, August 06, 2004

By Eriko Sugita, Reuters

HIROSHIMA, Japan — The mayor of Hiroshima rebuked Washington on Friday — the 59th anniversary of his city's atomic bombing by the United States — for wanting to develop small nuclear weapons that he feared would be easier to use.

Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba made the remarks at a ceremony attended by about 40,000 people, including Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi plus survivors and relatives of victims of the world's first atomic attack.

"The egocentric world view of the U.S. government is reaching extremes," Akiba told the annual memorial ceremony at the city's Peace Park, near where the bomb was dropped.

"Ignoring the United Nations and its foundation of international law, the U.S. has resumed research to make nuclear weapons smaller and more 'usable'."

The Peace Bell was tolled at 8:15 a.m. — the moment a U.S. warplane dropped the bomb on August 6, 1945 and destroyed the city — and there was a minute of silence.

"The morning of August 6, 59 years ago, was just another summer morning, but a single atomic bomb changed it into a morning that humankind will never forget," 11-year-old Koya Yurino told the assembly.

Paper cranes symbolizing peace were draped around the park and incense burned on prayer altars as Akiba placed three books containing the names of the bomb's victims under the park's arch-shaped cenotaph.

The names of 5,142 people who died recently were added to the list of victims, bringing the total number recognized by the city to 237,062. A few thousand names are added each year.

The bomb had killed some 140,000 people by the end of 1945, out of Hiroshima's estimated population of 350,000. Thousands more succumbed to illness and injuries later.

The southwestern city of Nagasaki was bombed three days after Hiroshima, leading to Japan's surrender and the end of World War II.

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Japan, where people are raised on stories of the suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has been staunchly pacifist and anti-nuclear since its defeat, and its postwar constitution renounces the right to go to war.

But with the average age of Hiroshima's survivors now well over 70, there are signs that support for the country to assume a greater global military role is growing.

Even talk of becoming a nuclear power is no longer taboo.

However, Koizumi repeated a pledge that Japan — the only nation to suffer an atomic attack — would work for nuclear disarmament.

"We will maintain the pacifist constitution under our strong resolve to never again repeat the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," he said at the ceremony.

Under Koizumi, Japan has passed a law allowing its military to participate in the rebuilding of Iraq and has sent 550 soldiers to Iraq in its largest post-war dispatch of troops.

Koizumi's ruling party and the largest opposition party are both working on drafts to revise the constitution, whose Article Nine renounces war as a means of settling international disputes.

Source: Reuters

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