

In message to Israelis, Japanese wartime victims detail horrors of bombings

March 26, 2015

[Tweet](#) 12 [Recommend](#) 40 [G+1](#) 3

By TAKASHI WATANABE/ Correspondent

JERUSALEM--Japanese survivors of U.S. bombing attacks in World War II urged the people of Israel to understand the tremendous damage inflicted on civilian populations during wartime.

Speaking at a March 23 gathering in Jerusalem before about 20 people, Atsuko Uehara, a 77-year-old from Tokyo, told of her experiences when B-29 bombers dropped incendiaries on the Japanese capital on March 10, 1945, leaving 100,000 people dead and reducing a vast area to ashes.

Also telling his wartime tale was Michimasa Hirata, a 79-year-old hibakusha victim of the Aug. 6, 1945, atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

The session was part of gatherings and academic conferences themed on the Great Tokyo Air Raid and the nuclear attack on Hiroshima that were held through March 25 in Israel.

Since the end of World War II, millions of civilians have been killed in wars and conflicts across the globe. In battles last summer between the Israeli military and Hamas, the Islamist organization that effectively controls the Gaza Strip, more than 2,100 civilians were reportedly killed. More than 70 Israeli citizens also died in the conflict.

"I hope this conference will remind us again how easily moral barriers can be broken in war and why it is important to keep them," said Rotem Kowner, a Japanese history professor at the University of Haifa in the northern part of Israel.

The university first proposed an academic conference about the Tokyo air raid.

Kowner said the destruction caused by the March 10, 1945, air raid should be more widely known globally.

In fact, some of those attending the March 23 session were surprised that the Tokyo air raid was not as well known as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, despite the massive scale of destruction of the capital.

Others pointed out that the aerial attack was different from the atomic bombing in that conventional weapons were used.

Sharon Dolev, a 45-year-old director of Israeli Disarmament Movement that organized the session, said the Israeli people need to deliberate about their country's own stockpile of nuclear weapons.

"It is important not just to talk about Iran, as we do in Israel, but also about our own arsenal and understand what happens to the people it might affect," she said. "Seventy years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the hibakusha are aging, and sadly, soon, we won't be able to hear them directly and talk to them."

Although Israel does not officially acknowledge that it possesses nuclear weapons, it is widely recognized that it does.

"We think it is crucial for Israelis to break the taboo around this topic in Israel. Listening to hibakusha is one important way," Dolev said.

The participants also asked Uehara and Hirata if they have received any compensation and what their feelings are toward the United States, Japan's wartime enemy.

Also speaking at an academic conference on March 25 was 74-year-old Masao Sato, who escaped the Tokyo firebombing while being carried on the back of his 15-year-old sister. Sato recalled seeing many bodies on the ground as he and his sister fled to safer ground.

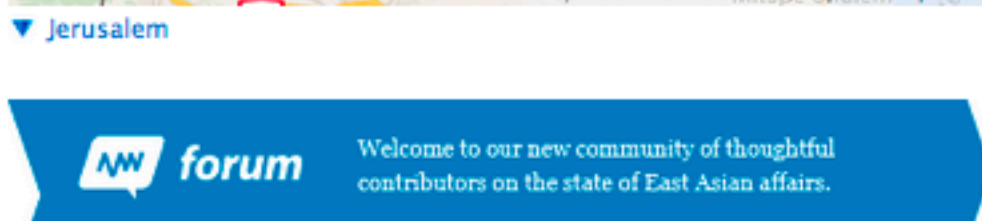
After the end of the war, Sato was employed by a trading company and spent many years working abroad. He said he became interested in the history of Israel after he visited the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland and other wartime facilities.

"The Holocaust and the Great Tokyo Air Raid are the same in that ordinary people were slaughtered for no reason," Sato said.

By TAKASHI WATANABE/ Correspondent



Atsuko Uehara, a victim of the March 10, 1945, U.S. air raid on Tokyo, speaks of her experiences at a gathering in Jerusalem on March 23. (Takashi Watanabe)



More AJW