

HIROSHIMA/NAGASAKI SPEECH -- KENT WONG,FOR THE ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS FOR NUCLEAR AWARENESS (APANA)

Today marks the 41st anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki. Three days ago marked the 41st anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, human history will never again be the same.

We gather today to pay our respects to those who have perished. Some of us gathered here today lost friends and family in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some of us gathered here today, the hibakusha and children of the hibakusha, are lucky to be here at all. But regardless of our background, we all gather today to pay our respects to the 100's of 1,000's of men, women and children, who, like all of us, once worked and played, loved and cried, and enjoyed life through its pain and pleasure. And then the bomb was dropped, and life came to a screeching halt and to an unspeakable end. And human history will never again be the same.

For those who perished, their spirit is still very much with us today. Like Sadako, their legacy involves a commitment that we must make, to insure that the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is never again repeated.

Two years ago, we helped to bring embers from the Hiroshima Eternal Flame for Peace to this country for the first time in history. In the area surrounding the Eternal Flame for Peace in Hiroshima, names of those who perished are buried under the ground, since most near the epicenter were reduced to dust, and thus they could never receive a proper burial. At the base of the Peace Flame the words are inscribed--"Rest in Peace, we will not make the same mistake again."

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At this very moment, one of our APANA members, Mike Mertens, is walking across this country, carrying the eternal flame for peace and carrying our message of peace and solidarity.

Everywhere Mike goes, the message of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the message of world peace also goes with him. He has traveled through countless towns and cities, he has met and talked to hundreds and thousands of people who may not know about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, except perhaps a vague memory, an unpleasant story from the past. Mike has dedicated 9 months of his life, and all of his meager life savings, to bring this message of peace, of hope and of inspiration. And each step he takes brings us one step closer to our realization of a world without the threat of nuclear war. Mike Mertens and the Great Peace Marchers are keepers of the flame.

Keepers of the flame light the way for others to follow. Keepers of the flame bring light to darkness, bring hope to despair, bring community to the dispossessed.

Our brothers and sisters at Big Mountain are keepers of the flame. They are bravely risking threats from the government, fighting for their land, demanding that people's needs be met over corporate greed. The people of Belau, an island in the South Pacific, are also keepers of the flame. In the face of pressure from the U.S. government to overturn the nuclear free constitution voted by the people, the people of Belau are standing strong. From Big Mountain to Belau, the struggle is the same: for land, for self-determination, and against nuclear exploitation.



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Our brothers and sisters who caravanned to the Nevada desert this week to protest continued nuclear weapons tests are keepers of the flame. Some risked jail in an act of civil disobedience--an act of love and selflessness. In the face of the lies and hypocrisy of the Reagan Administration, we are seeing the light of truth. Is it the Soviets or is it the U.S. military that is the true threat to our security? Is it for our national security that nuclear weapons are detonated in the Nevada desert? Are we to sleep better at nights knowing that one bright star over our heads may in fact be the ultimate weapon of destruction which may cause us never to awake?

The keepers of the flame are our brothers and sisters at UC campuses across the state who finally succeeded in demanding that the UC Regents divest from South Africa! In an era when the media is promoting the myth that students are apathetic and unconcerned, these students set up Mandela cities, shantytowns, picketted and demonstrated to demand that no more dollars be spent on apartheid. UC students are keepers of the flame.

The keepers of the flame are the sanctuary workers in Arizona, who offered their homes and churches as sanctuaries for Central American refugees fleeing persecution. They stand undaunted in the face of FBI agents who used tape records to attend their prayer sessions. Not even the threat of jail will stop the sanctuary movement. Sanctuary workers are keepers of the flame.

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In our movement for peace and social justice, our flame will continue to grow brighter and stronger. Who could imagine that a flame burning in the city of Hiroshima, could be brought thousands of miles away to us here in Los Angeles? Who could imagine that our peace flame could travel on foot 3,000 miles across this country? Who could imagine that the task Sadako began in making 1,000 cranes would be carried on generation to generation, as a symbol of world peace.

We in APANA are convinced that we can build a brighter future. We call upon you, if you share our vision, if you share our goals, to please join us. We must not accept nuclear war as an inevitability. We must not be silent in the face of an administration which is leading us on a path of death and destruction, an administration intent on building silos instead of cities, arming the contras instead of housing the homeless, supporting apartheid while opposing arms negotiations.

In a few minutes, we will together read a beautiful litany written by Rev. Wes Yamaka, we will then have a candle lighting ceremony with candles lit from the Hiroshima Peace Flame, and we will have a candle light procession to City Hall. As each of you pause to pick up your candle, to light your flame, please reflect for one moment. As you take each careful step to insure that the flame stays lit, remember that each and every one of you is a keeper of the flame.



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To be a keeper of the flame is a noble task, it is a responsibility, it is a commitment to step forward in the face of injustice, in the face of oppression, in the face of apathy. It is a call to step forward and join the ranks of the millions of people who do not want to live a life under the nuclear shadow, the millions who are this very day fighting for liberation, for peace and for justice. Tonight we can see how one light can be used to light so many others. Tomorrow, keepers of the flame will light our way to a brighter future for ourselves and for our children.