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Live Updates: Nobel Peace Prize Is Awarded to Japanese Group of Atomic Bomb Survivors

Nihon Hidankyo is a grass-roots movement of survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The group's efforts have helped establish a "nuclear taboo," the Nobel committee said.

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Megan Specia and Lynsey Chutel



Here is what to know about Nihon Hidankyo.

The 2024 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded on Friday to the Japanese organization Nihon Hidankyo, a grass-roots movement of atomic bomb survivors, "for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons."

Nihon Hidankyo has for decades represented hundreds of thousands of survivors of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. These survivors, known as the hibakusha, are living memorials to the horror of the attacks and have used their testimony to raise awareness of the human consequences of nuclear warfare.

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Hannah Beech, Hisako Ueno and Kiuko Notoya



They were bombed, and then shunned. Now the nuclear survivors are being honored.



Wreckage after the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945. Associated Press

They crawled out from the wreckage of twin atomic bomb blasts, their flesh burned, their bodies irradiated and their family members obliterated by mushroom clouds of devastating intent.

And then they were shunned.

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John Yoon, Hisako Ueno and Kiuko Notoya



For the atomic bomb survivors, the Nobel is a bittersweet victory.



Shigemitsu Tanaka, a member of Nihon Hidankyo, reacting in Nagasaki, Japan, after the Nobel announcement on Friday. *Kyodo, via Reuters*

Toshiyuki Mimaki was just 3 when he saw the flash from the nuclear weapon that wiped out some 100,000 lives in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945. Nearly eight decades later, as a leader of Nihon Hidankyo, a group of fellow atomic bomb survivors that received the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday, he renewed his plea to abolish nuclear weapons.

“We don’t have much life left anymore,” said Mr. Mimaki, who is now 82. “I am not sure I will be alive next year.”

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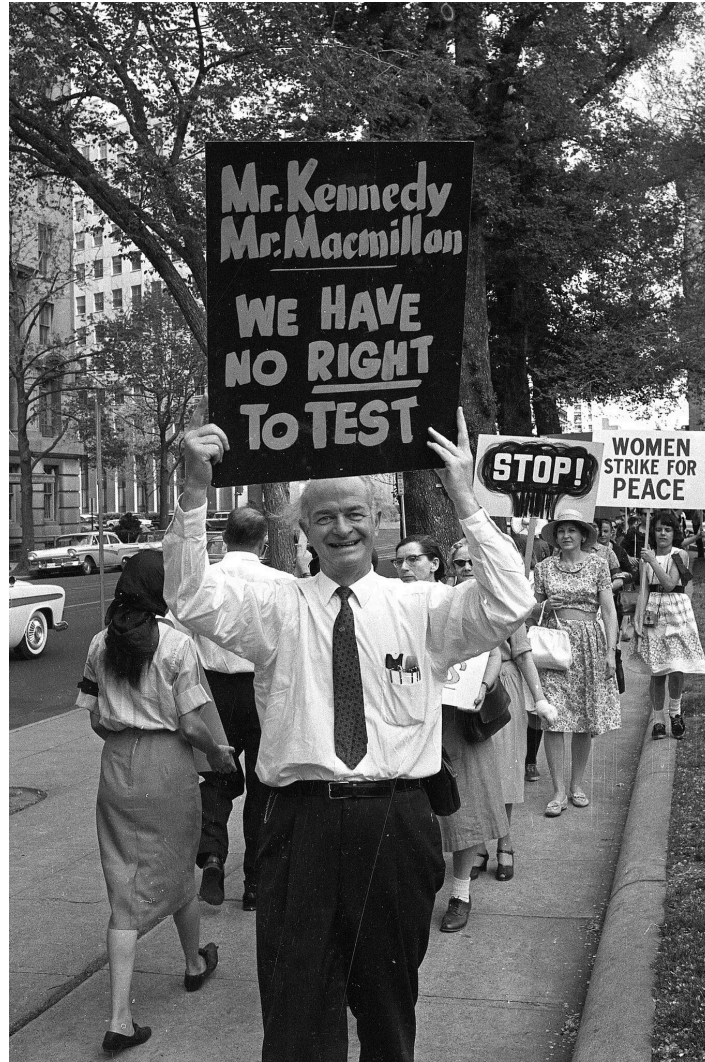


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Lynsey Chutel



These earlier Peace Prize recipients also campaigned against the use of nuclear weapons.



Linus Pauling at a protest outside the White House in April 1962, the year he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Associated Press

This is not the first time the Norwegian Nobel Committee has bestowed the Peace Prize on a group or individual for their work in opposing the use of nuclear weapons.

That is because, as Jorgen Watne Frydnes, the committee's chairman, said in his announcement of the 2024 award on Friday, the decision to honor Nihon Hidankyo is "securely anchored in Alfred Nobel's will."

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Steven Erlanger and Anton Troianovski



An award for Japanese survivors reflects new global concerns.



A Russian strategic nuclear missile in Moscow before a rehearsal for a military parade in May. Alexander Zemlianichenko/Associated Press

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Japan’s atomic bomb survivors comes amid concern about the potential use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine and about nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and Asia.

In announcing the award, the Norwegian Nobel Committee expressed its fear that the “taboo” against the use of nuclear weapons was under threat, without identifying any countries in particular.

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Here's how the Peace Prize nomination process works.

It is always difficult to predict who might receive the Nobel Peace Prize, not least because the nomination process attracts several hundred nominees every year.

Since the Nobel Committee does not make public its top nominees, there is, inevitably, widespread speculation about who the winner might be. Lists of possible front-runners are often based on guesswork or information put out by those who nominated the person or group.

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The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons congratulated Nihon Hidankyo and described the hibakusha as “inspirational survivors” who “have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the catastrophic impacts of nuclear weapons and push for their total elimination.”

The campaign, an international coalition of nongovernmental organizations, itself received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.



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The survivors became known as ‘bomb-affected people.’



Nagasaki Peace Park in southwestern Japan on Friday. Kyodo, via Reuters

Some 200,000 people were killed when U.S. forces dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer of 1945, leveling large swaths of both Japanese cities. But many more survived, some with life-changing injuries, others bearing the terrible emotional scars of the devastation and death they had witnessed.

Those survivors became known as “hibakusha,” which translates as “bomb-affected people.”

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Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba of Japan said in a news conference during a visit to Laos that he believed it was “extremely significant that the Nobel Peace Prize should be awarded to this organization, which has been working for many years toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.”

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Toshiyuki Mimaki, the president of Nihon Hidankyo, who was watching a broadcast of the announcement from Hiroshima's City Hall, shed tears of joy. “Please abolish nuclear weapons while we are alive,” he said when asked what he wanted to convey to people around the world. “That is the wish of 114,000 hibakusha.”



Jiji Press/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



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Mimaki, a survivor of the atomic bombings, said that many other survivors had died from old age but that those remaining still hoped they would be alive to see nuclear weapons disappear. “We don’t have much life left anymore,” he said. “I am not sure I will be alive next year.”



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Henrik Urdal, the director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, said in a statement that presenting the award to Nihon Hidankyo “comes at a crucial time when countries are modernizing their nuclear arsenals, and threats of use by traditional and emerging nuclear powers are alarmingly on the rise.”

“In an era where automated weapon systems and A.I.-driven warfare are emerging, their call for disarmament is not just historical — it is a critical message for our future,” he added, referring to the group.



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Nihon Hidankyo has been nominated for the Nobel before. The International Peace Bureau, an organization focused on disarmament and itself the 1910 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, nominated the Japanese organization in 1985 and again in 1994.



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During the 2005 Nobel ceremony, when the International Atomic Energy Agency was awarded the Peace Prize, the committee also mentioned Nihon Hidankyo and the hibakusha for their work in campaigning against nuclear and atomic warfare.



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Established 11 years after the end of World War II, Nihon Hidankyo began as an organization representing the survivors of the atomic bomb attacks who continued to suffer not only the physical effects of radiation, but also the social stigma.



Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



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In the 68 years since its founding, Nihon Hidankyo has sent survivors to countries around the world to share their experiences of living with the effects of radiation exposure from an atomic bomb.

“Humanity must never again inflict nor suffer the sacrifice and torture we have experienced,” the group said in its founding statement in 1956.

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In Japan, the survivors of the American atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which killed an estimated 200,000 people, are living memorials to the blasts. Many survivors, known as hibakusha, see their life's work as informing the wider world about what it's like to carry the trauma, stigma and survivor's guilt caused by the bombs, so that nuclear weapons may never be used again. This year, The New York Times's opinion section wrote about the survivors. Read the article.



Kentaro Takahashi for The New York Times



Kentaro Takahashi for The New York Times



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Aritz Parra



This is the moment when the Norwegian Nobel Committee chairman, Jorgen Watne Frydnes, announced this year's Peace Prize for Japan's Nihon Hidankyo.



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Nihon Hidankyo represents more than 300,000 survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks, known as the hibakusha. These survivors have used their testimony to raise awareness of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear warfare.



The Asahi Shimbun, via Getty Images



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Asked what message the Nobel committee hoped to send by awarding the prize to Nihon Hidankyo, as wars rage on multiple continents, Frydnes said it was important to remind the world of the firsthand accounts of survivors of nuclear weapons.

“When we look at the developments and the conflicts around the world, we see how crucial it is to uphold a nuclear taboo — to uphold the norm — saying nuclear weapons should never be used again,” he said.

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Frydnes said that the Nobel committee, in honoring Nihon Hidankyo, wished “to honor all survivors who despite physical suffering and painful memories have chosen to use their painful experience to cultivate hope.”



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Jorgen Watne Frydnes, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said that Nihon Hidankyo, a grass-roots movement of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was being recognized “for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and for demonstrating through witness testimony that nuclear weapons never be used again.”



Javad Parsa/NTB, via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



Oct. 4, 2024
Derrick Bryson Taylor



Nobels in the sciences and literature have already been awarded.



Replicas of the Nobel Peace Prize medal on display at The Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo. Jonathan Nackstrand/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Nobel Prize season is upon us. Every October, committees in Sweden and Norway name laureates in a variety of prizes related to science, literature and economics, as well as peace work. In total, six prizes are awarded.

Laureates will receive their Nobel Prize medals and diplomas in Stockholm in December.

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