

Canada must acknowledge its key role in developing the deadly atomic bomb

[Commentary by Setsuko Thurlow, published in the *Globe and Mail*, Aug 1, 2020](#)

On Aug. 6 and Aug. 9, the largest bell in the Peace Tower at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa will ring 75 times to mark the dropping of the two atom bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The arrangement was made by the Green Party's Elizabeth May and Canada's Speaker of the House, Liberal MP Anthony Rota. The bell ringing by the Dominion carillonneur Andrea McCrady will be livestreamed by the [Peace Tower Carillon website](#) so that it may be heard across Canada and around the world.

As someone who witnessed and experienced the consequences of nuclear war, I very often have brutal images in my mind of the atomic bombing.

As a 13-year-old schoolgirl, I witnessed my city of Hiroshima blinded by the flash, flattened by the hurricane-like blast, incinerated in the heat of 4,000 degrees and contaminated by the radiation of one atomic bomb. A bright summer morning turned to dark twilight with smoke and dust rising in the mushroom cloud, dead and injured covering the ground, begging desperately for water and receiving no medical care. The spreading firestorm and the foul stench of burnt flesh filled the air.

As a *hibakusha*, a survivor of the atomic bombing, I was honoured to jointly accept the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

To mark the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings, I have written to all the heads of state and governments across the world on behalf of ICAN, asking them to ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This included a special letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

My brief to Mr. Trudeau pointed to the Mackenzie King government takeover of Eldorado Gold Mines Ltd. in 1942 and the nationalization of its uranium mine at Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories by the government in January, 1944. Eldorado's refinery in Port Hope, Ont., refined all the uranium ore from Canada and the Belgian Congo used by the Manhattan Project to produce the first nuclear weapons for the U.S. Army.

At the direction of C.D. Howe, King's minister of munitions and supply, the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Co. in Trail, B.C., also signed contracts with the Manhattan Project in November, 1942, to produce heavy water for nuclear reactors to produce plutonium.

In August of 1943, King hosted president Franklin D. Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill in Quebec City, where they signed the Quebec Agreement to jointly develop the atom bomb. Howe, King's most powerful minister, represented Canada on a Combined Policy Committee that co-ordinated the joint research by the United States, Britain and Canada

on creating atomic weapons. King affirmed in his diary that the Quebec Agreement “made Canada also a party to the development.”

The National Research Council of Canada was heavily involved in the Manhattan Project and in the research by British scientists to develop the atom bomb. In April of 1944, King’s Cabinet War Committee approved expenditures for the National Research Council to design and operate nuclear reactors in Montreal and at Chalk River, Ont., whose discoveries about the production of plutonium would be shared with those involved in the Manhattan Project.

Yet Canada’s extensive role in the Manhattan Project and the development of the atom bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been completely wiped from the collective Canadian consciousness and memory.

The Canadian government has never publicly acknowledged its participation in the Manhattan Project after gloating about it when the bombs were first dropped in 1945. There is little published about Canada’s contribution in the creation of atomic weapons and the subject is not taught in schools. Canadians of all ages believe Canada had nothing to do with the American atom bomb.

In my appeal to Mr. Trudeau, I asked that the government acknowledge Canada’s participation in the Manhattan Project and that the Prime Minister issue a statement of regret for the deaths and immense suffering inflicted on the inhabitants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I am praying that the bell ringing in the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill will occur at the same time that Mr. Trudeau issues a public expression of regret for Canada’s role and announces that Canada will ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

It would be terribly ironic to have an acknowledgement of the bombings of the two cities from the Peace Tower if inside the Parliament buildings the Prime Minister refused to acknowledge Canada’s role.

By the end of 1945, more than 140,000 people had perished in the nuclear strike against Hiroshima. Another 70,000 died in the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

When Mr. Trudeau hears the bell in the Peace Tower strike 75 times on Aug. 6 and 9, I hope he will not wonder why. As John Donne wrote in his famous poem, “Any man’s death diminishes me ... never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”

(Setsuko Thurlow is a Canadian nuclear disarmament campaigner and survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima. She was 13 years old at the time of the bombing.)