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Hiroshima Day marked by Kansas City activist sentencing

by Joshua J. McElwee



Jane Stoever talks with Kansas City, Mo. radio host Tom Klammer on the steps of the Charles Evans Whittaker U.S. Courthouse in Kansas City, Mo. August 6.

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Offering the U.S. magistrate judge hearing her case a tiny box from Japan carrying a tightly folded peace crane, a Catholic activist here was sentenced to eight hours of community service for having blocked the entrance to a local nuclear weapons manufacturing facility.

The civil disobedience sentence in federal court came on the 65th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

Jane Stoever, a local peace activist, had pleaded no contest to the disorderly conduct charges stemming from an action with three others June 18. The others agreed to pay fines and were not called before the judge.

Stoever, who was represented by her husband, attorney Henry Stoever, had asked for community service in lieu of a fine.

In her statement to Judge John T. Maughmer, Stoever called attention to a speech given by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kan. May 8.

In that speech Gates noted that the last decade has seen an explosion of defense spending almost like a "gusher" and promised that "the gusher has been turned off, and will stay off for a good period of time."

Stoever disagreed. "We've still got the gusher in Kansas City," she said, referring to the city's approval last February of a new \$673 million nuclear weapons manufacturing facility known as the Kansas City Plant.

Currently a part of the Bannister Federal Complex, located about 13 miles south of the city's downtown area, the plant is responsible for the production and assembly of approximately 85 percent of the non-nuclear components of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. It is due to be relocated to a new, more modern facility beginning in 2012.

Stoever was arrested at the Bannister plant as part of a local campaign of nonviolent resistance aimed at bringing attention to the construction of the new nuclear facility.



With two dozen supporters in the courtroom, Stoever read a statement telling the story of Yoshiko Kajimoto, a survivor of the Hiroshima attack who was a 14-year-old schoolgirl when the bomb leveled that city.

Recalling how she met Kajimoto two years ago when the survivor came to Kansas City to talk with Americans about her story, Stoever said Kajimoto implored her to "have the United States unmake its nuclear bombs and lead the world in dismantling nuclear weapons."

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Meanwhile, in other Hiroshima related events, the Associated Press reported that for the first time the United States sent a U.S. ambassador to the Hiroshima, Japan commemorations.

Hiroshima's mayor Tadatoshi Akiba welcomed Washington's decision to send U.S. Ambassador John Roos to Friday's commemoration, which began with a symbolic offering of water to the 140,000 who died in the first of two nuclear bombings on Japan.

Hiroshima was the site of the world's first Atomic bomb blast on a civilian target. The ceremony involved choirs of schoolchildren and the solemn ringing of bells. At precisely 8:15 a.m., the time the bomb was dropped, incinerating most of the city, a moment of silence was observed.

In his annual "Peace Declaration," Akiba implored the global community to heed the warnings of Hiroshima and actively work for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Speaking to the international dignitaries gathered at the event about the pain suffered by the "hibakusha" — the term in Japanese for those that survived the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki — Akiba said:

"Clearly, the urgency of nuclear weapons abolition is permeating our global conscience; the voice of the vast majority is becoming the pre-eminent force for change in the international community.

"To seize this unprecedented opportunity and actually achieve a world without nuclear weapons, we need above all to communicate to every corner of our planet the intense yearning of the hibakusha, thereby narrowing the gap between their passion and the rest of the world."

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