

# Obama's Hiroshima visit

## First sitting U.S. president makes historic Hiroshima trip

U.S. President Barack Obama will on Friday make what the White House called a "historic visit" to Hiroshima, the first city, and one of only two cities in the world, to have suffered an atomic bombing.

Obama will be the first sitting U.S. president to visit the city, where thousands of citizens were killed a moment after a midair atomic bomb detonation over the city on Aug. 6, 1945.

The president is expected to offer flowers and deliver brief remarks at the Peace Memorial Park, where Japan holds a memorial ceremony every year on the bombing anniversary to mourn the victims of the bombing and of the subsequent aftermath, now amounting to nearly 300,000 victims. Obama will travel to Hiroshima after attending the G-7 Ise-Shima summit in Mie Prefecture.

The visit, which required months of arrangements by officials in Tokyo and Washington, was considered a particularly sensitive issue by the White House, as Obama's side was worried the visit could be interpreted as a trip to apologize for the nuclear bombing.

There are still many in the U.S. who steadfastly justify the use of atomic bombs, saying that the Hiroshima bombing and the Aug. 9 Nagasaki bombing expedited the end of the Pacific War and resulted in saving the lives of many U.S. soldiers who may have otherwise been killed in combat.

Those people insist that Obama should not apologize during his visit to Hiroshima and the president himself has said, in an interview with NHK aired on May 22, that he will not make one.

**Apology not first priority**  
As a matter of fact, an apology is not an issue, or at least is not something strongly demanded, among A-bomb survivors.

Terumi Tanaka, secretary general of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, made it clear that Japanese survivors of the



**U.S. President Barack Obama delivers a speech in Prague in April 2009.** KYODO

nuclear bombings are not demanding an apology from Obama during his visit. The survivors would welcome his apology, if made, but they would rather see the president use his office to make progress toward realizing a world without nuclear weapons, a goal put forth by Obama in a speech he delivered in Prague in 2009, he said.

In press conferences held in Tokyo on May 19, Tanaka said that the survivors want Obama to come to Hiroshima, as well as Nagasaki if possible, to visit museums to see for himself what exactly happened, and, ideally, talk to the survivors. If making an apology makes it difficult for him to do so, one is not necessary, Tanaka, a survivor of the Nagasaki bombing, said at the press conferences.

Indeed, a letter sent to the president by the organization dated May 18 via the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo makes no mention of an apology as a request. Instead, the letter places the first priority of the organization's agenda on the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons, and requests that Obama "make every effort to pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty" during his term.

The request was made at a time when the number of nuclear bomb survivors is a little less than 190,000, less than half of the peak of 370,000, and the survivors

are disappointed with the scant progress made since his 2009 speech, which garnered him a Nobel Peace Prize, in achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

### Language issues

The concern for the Japanese side, particularly the Foreign Ministry, was the difference in the wording used for the Japanese and English versions of the Hiroshima Declaration, a joint statement issued at the close of the Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting held last month in Hiroshima.

In the opening statement of the declaration, the English version of the document says, "The people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced immense devastation and human suffering as a consequence of the atomic bombings and have rebuilt their cities so impressively."

The words "human suffering" in the sentence were translated in the Japanese version into words meaning "inhumane suffering,"

although the Japanese version is based only on a tentative translation of the original English-language statement.

The foreign ministry didn't use "inhumane suffering" in the English statement, as the ministry was worried it would not have gained approval for the statement from the U.S., U.K. and France, the G-7 nations with nuclear weapons, if the words were used in the statement, according to some Japanese media reports.

"Inhumane suffering" has a stronger meaning and is a somewhat touchy word, and may have provoked opposition from G-7 nuclear powers, the report said.

On the other hand, the ministry had to use the expression of "inhumane suffering" in the Japanese version to appease the survivors, the media reports explained.

### Place for mourning

The Atomic Bomb Dome, which was registered as a

UNESCO World Heritage site, stands in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, attracting many tourists, both domestic and foreign. On most days, there are some senior citizen volunteers who walk around the dome to offer visitors free tours, explaining what exactly happened on the day of the bombing, and what happened afterward, in Hiroshima.

On a sunny spring day earlier this month, several groups of students were taking photos of each other, taking turns standing in front of the dome, with some smiling and others flashing V-signs to the camera, a typical tourist pose at sightseeing spots. It is understandable to see students behaving like this, but it is unacceptable to see a teacher doing the same thing, one of the volunteer guides said.

"This place is supposed to be a place to mourn and pay our respects to the victims, not just an ordinary sightseeing spot," the guide said.



**U.S. President Barack Obama waves after a speech expressing resolve to seek a world without nuclear weapons in Prague in April 2009.** KYODO



**Above left: Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida (left), U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond offer wreaths at the Hiroshima Memorial Park on the sidelines of the G-7 foreign ministers' meeting in Hiroshima on April 11; The A-Bomb Dome in Hiroshima that Obama will visit on Friday.** KYODO/Flicker



With best wishes  
for the friendship  
between our two nations  
we warmly welcome  
President Barack Obama  
to Japan

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**Our Heartiest Welcome to  
President Barack Obama  
of the United States of America  
on the occasion of  
His Historic Visit to Hiroshima**

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