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Indigenous Women's Initiatives, WNY Peace Center remember victims of nuclear bombings

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Victoria Ross, director of the WNY Peace Center, said her motto is "money for living, not for dying."

The Indigenous Women's Initiatives and the WNY Peace Center gifted the Buffalo History Museum last Thursday with photographs connected to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in addition to a petition from the nuclear bombing survivors.

This event took place outdoors at the Buffalo History Museum exactly 75 years after the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. Through these gifts to the museum, the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs hopes to encourage activities for peace and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Melissa Brown, the executive director of the Buffalo History Museum, was present at the event, and the museum received this gift from the Hibakusha, the survivors of the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Accompanied by a petition to abolish nuclear weapons, the gifted photos depict the destruction and the injuries that followed the dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan.

Agnes Williams, a member of the Indigenous Women's Initiatives, also attended the event. Although the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were 75 years ago, the

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processes involved in nuclear proliferation continue to harm indigenous communities today.



Present at last week's ceremony were, from left, Agnes Williams, Indigenous Women's Initiatives; Victoria Ross, director of the WNY Peace Center; Jim Anderson, vice president for Citizen Action of New York; and Melissa Brown, executive director of the Buffalo History Museum. Photos by David F. Sherman

"Indigenous people are at the beginning and the end of the nuclear chain: uranium mining and waste disposal," Williams said. "We've been trying to stop uranium mining."

The Indigenous Women's Initiatives is particularly interested in cleaning up the **West Valley Nuclear Waste site** in Cattaraugus County.

"Our main concern here about **West Valley** is that it goes into the Cattaraugus, to our reservation, into Lake Erie, and then into the water intake for Erie County," Williams said. "So everybody in Erie County is drinking irradiated water, and we're trying to get a full cleanup at **West Valley**."

Indigenous communities in the area do not have the technology to clean up nuclear waste disposal sites. Even though these native communities do not have any choice or role in the waste disposal, they have to deal with the destructive consequences, including irradiated drinking water and breathable toxins.

"We live along the [Cattaraugus] Creek, and we still eat the fish and the plants," Williams said. "We don't even have a grocery store on our reservations, so we're still subsisting on irradiated wildlife."

Along with the Aug. 6 press conference at the Buffalo History Museum, the WNY Peace Center hosted a Japanese Lantern Ceremony at Lake Muir on Aug. 9, the International Day of the World's Indigenous People. Although the day's activities are typically held in-person with food and performances, individuals participated virtually in the Peace Center's events this year.

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In addition to commemorating the lives lost to the nuclear bombings, this year's lantern ceremony also honored COVID-19 victims and Black Lives Matter victims.

"You see the international connection in this moment," said Jim Anderson, vice president of Citizen Action of New York. "So what is the need? The need is for us to hear what the Hibakusha bear witness to: that these weapons are an act of insanity to use, and that we need not have them on the planet. All over the world, communities like ours are pushing back on governments who have spent more money on weapons of war and less on human needs."

Victoria Ross, executive director of the WNY Peace Center, echoed similar sentiments about government spending, sharing her phrase and motto, "money for living, not for dying."

"Everybody is suffering from nuclear uranium mining and the waste," Williams said. "And they still don't know how to contain nuclear waste. It's going to be here long after we're gone. That's the problem."

When discussing the past and present history of nuclear proliferation, Anderson emphasized that nuclear bombs have been used as weapons of bullying and intimidation. While this has been a trend for much of history, Anderson is hopeful for the future.

"The UN talks about a culture of peace. That's what we should be working towards," Anderson said. "The world is getting smarter. There's a more youthful wing bringing the new knowledge, the new energy, the new demands. They want a world that works for all of us, at home and abroad."

Even with all of the progress that has been made during the past 75 years, local activists recognize that there is still urgency to their activism, and there is still more work to do.

"We've gotta change this," Anderson said. "From the block of our local streets to the blocks of the international streets. And we're gonna get there."