



A helmet for peace offered by two young Cypriots to the survivors of the atom bomb

Last week the Peace Boat, a Japanese based NGO that makes global voyages promoting, among others, the causes of peace, ending of poverty and environmental sustainability, made a one day stop in Cyprus, carrying hundreds of peace activists from many countries. Among them was a special group of eight Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bomb survivors (known as the Hibakusha) who offer their testimony and message of peace and a nuclear free world.

A simple but symbolically important ceremony took place on the Peace Boat a few hours before its departure. Two teenagers, one from each community, representing the bi-communal group The Cyprus Friendship Programme, offered to the Hibakusha an army helmet with a flower planted in it. The helmet that was made as part of a war machine was transformed into a vessel of peace. For Cypriots this has a special significance since we live in one of the most densely militarised parts of the planet.

In explaining the rationale of the gift, a Cyprus Friendship Programme coordinator said that when a solution to the Cyprus problem will be found and the demilitarisation of the island will be agreed, one of the questions will be what to do with the abundance of military hardware. The Cyprus Friendship Programme has a proposal and the ceremony on the Peace Boat is its first public statement on this matter: **We propose that the thousands of army helmets are given free to Cypriot households so that they can be transformed into flower pots hanging at the front of houses. And when the next generation will be asking what those are, we will say that they are reminders of a long period of conflict and pain that is no more.**

The atom bomb survivors accepted the gift with great joy. The audience which included many teens of the Cyprus Friendship Programme and their parents, the mayor of Limassol and many supporters of our work, was deeply moved by the ceremony. The helmet, together with an explanation of the event, will be on permanent display on the Peace Boat and this message will be carried in every country they will be visiting. At the end of the event the teens of the Cyprus Friendship Programme shouted the group motto: "In a country divided, people united." For more information call 99-498531 or 05338409792.

Related photos:

Photo 1: <http://tinypic.com/view.php?pic=11hv3ns&s=5>

The helmet with the flower in the middle of two army boots as it was in the garden of one of the Cyprus Friendship Programme coordinators before it was taken to the Peace Boat. The writing on the barrel is from Isaiah 2:4 "They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not turn up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more".

Photo 2: <http://tinypic.com/r/s4xmhw/5>

The helmet on the Peace Boat just before the ceremony.

Photo 3: <http://tinypic.com/r/1z1s77n/5>

The helmet being given by two teens of the Cyprus Friendship Programme to one survivor of Hiroshima and one of Nagasaki.

Photo 4: <http://tinypic.com/r/33jq0ls/5>

The eight atom bomb survivors with the teens of the Cyprus Friendship Programme.