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214,000 Civilian Deaths

In American history class, we like to pretend that everything bad happened thousands of years ago. We try to reassure our schoolchildren that the world they live in is new, and better, and the tragedies of the past can't reach us anymore. Unfortunately, the passage of time happens too quickly to pretend our days of war are far enough behind us to have no effect on our future.

The Manhattan Project was started in 1942. The US dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. There are an estimated 214,000-222,000 combined deaths, the only intentional civilian attack. It's very easy to simply list the facts of our history with nuclear weapons. The objective truths are presented to us in a pill that is easy to swallow. "214,000 deaths" is just a number, and it is impossible to comprehend the full loss of humanity on that day. These were not hardened war criminals, or even soldiers preparing to attack us. These were mothers playing on the floor with their children, businessmen thinking of their lonely families, and lovers wondering if they will ever see each other again. But "214,000" is just too many to process, so we brush over it, not understanding the raw tragedy of the truth.

Since the 1940s, nuclear weapons technology has only become more deadly. The governments of Earth maintain that so long as foreign countries continue to develop new ways of mass destruction, they must follow suit, or otherwise face being attacked. The only thing stopping us from being bombed is that we can retaliate with our own bombs. We are keeping peace by threatening violence, and in that way none of us are really at peace at all.

Between people's fear of "nukes" and the media's wild portrayals of nuclear apocalypses, it is clear that most would agree nuclear weapons have the potential to end our society. Despite the general population's fear of nuclear war, this topic receives very little public attention and not much is being done about it. It is certainly not an issue that most people worry about every day. However, as Beatrice Fihn (Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) reminds us, the future will come down to one ultimatum; either nuclear weapons will be destroyed, or we will. If we aren't careful, there are about to be a lot more than 214,000 civilian deaths.

It is rare to have the opportunity to prevent a serious problem before it is too late. This will never be an issue that is solved overnight, but we need to begin planning for it. Governments must recognize the need to work together. It can start as simple as spreading awareness, but it's time to start making noise. We have the power to let those 214,000 civilian deaths mean something, to ensure that future generations will not suffer the way them and their families have. Are we really going to stand back and watch that number grow?