

# THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION

## IPPNW 13<sup>th</sup> WORLD CONGRESS

"Healing the century of violence: towards sustainable peace"

December 4-6, 1998

*IPPNW won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for its work bringing together doctors from both sides of the Cold War to raise the alarm that nuclear war would constitute the final epidemic, to which no meaningful medical response would be possible. Prevention is the only cure.*

This is a time of unprecedented danger and unprecedented opportunity to abolish nuclear weapons.

### **The dangers**

The risk of all-out US/Russia nuclear war may well have receded, but the risk of use of nuclear weapons has increased. These weapons remain the greatest immediate threat to human survival and health. It is a threat which permeates, corrupts and debases all societies and one which holds hostage all aspects of life, indeed the future itself.

Of the 36,000 nuclear weapons still deployed, 5000 remain on hair-trigger alert. De-alerting those systems, and separating warheads from their delivery systems, would reduce the danger of accidental or impulsive 'launch on warning'. This is a key intermediate step towards decommissioning those warheads and eventually eliminating them. De-alerting could be accomplished simply, and in a matter of days. All it requires is political will.

The risks associated with year 2000 'millennium bug' computer malfunction make de-alerting an urgent priority. Defence officials are unable to give assurances that all date-sensitive computer components in nuclear weapon systems can be identified and corrected before 1 Jan 2000. There have been numerous occasions when malfunctions in early warning, command and control systems have come perilously close to actual launch of nuclear weapons.

More countries have joined the 'nuclear club' and others aspire to join it. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has been a hollow victory. It did not stop testing by India and Pakistan; it does not stop the development of nuclear weapons by simulation and subcritical nuclear tests. The current US budget for nuclear weapons development, under the 'Stockpile Stewardship Program', exceeds that during the Cold War.

The crisis in Russia makes its nuclear weapons systems increasingly prone to disrepair, theft and accident. The risk of leakage of nuclear materials and expertise increases steadily. Russia regards NATO expansion as a threat, resulting in increased reluctance to dismantle its nuclear arsenal. The Russian Parliament continues to refuse to ratify the START 2 Treaty, and Russia has abandoned its pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons.

### **The opportunities**

Nuclear alliances are finally crumbling. Generals and world leaders have called for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Public opinion polls in the US, Canada, Germany, Norway and Australia show that more than 80% of the public want their governments to work for a treaty for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Even at the UN, nuclear weapons states can no longer count on the unwavering support of NATO members, against the rest of the world.

The World Court has stated that the nuclear weapons states have a universal legal obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament in all its aspects. This places continued reliance on nuclear deterrence in clear contravention of international law. Nuclear weapons states cannot demand that other states comply with international law while at the same time disregarding their own obligations.

We have succeeded in banning biological weapons, chemical weapons and landmines, but not nuclear weapons. A draft Nuclear Weapons Convention has been tabled at the UN. There could be no better gift to the new millennium than a treaty to abolish nuclear weapons.

The abolition of nuclear weapons would liberate human and economic resources to address the serious crises that face the world: hunger, growing inequity between rich and poor, climatic change, resource depletion, environmental degradation and emerging pandemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and many other diseases.

The abolition of nuclear weapons remains the most critical unachieved global health task. The opportunity has never been better to fulfill the promise of the end of the Cold War, to heal the century of violence and build sustainable peace. We owe ourselves and our children nothing less.