

The Washington Declaration

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We, participants in the 15th World Congress of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, have been reminded that the ancient enemies of mankind - hunger, pestilence, poverty, and war continue to claim millions of lives each year, but now are joined by new, acute threats: weapons of mass destruction, landmines, small arms, and global environmental damage, all driven by global inequities and the yawning gap between the Global North and the Global South.

Our world is increasingly interdependent, and all of the great threats that humanity faces transcend national boundaries. None can be addressed by a single nation, no matter how powerful. These threats require international cooperation, the strengthening of international institutions, a just and equitable economic order and of the rule of international law.

The risk of nuclear war continues to threaten human survival. We physicians recognize that the casualties resulting from even a single nuclear explosion would overwhelm the medical facilities in any city on Earth. The use of nuclear weapons is morally indefensible, and the International Court of Justice has declared their use and threatened use illegal. Yet nuclear weapons remain part of the military strategy of many nations, and deliberate use of nuclear weapons remains an ever-present threat, particularly in the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan. Nuclear war must be prevented; nuclear weapons must be abolished.

We resolutely condemn the horrifying and unjustifiable events of September 11, the most dramatic of many recent acts of terrorism which now threaten everyday life in many places, particularly Israel and Palestine. We fear that such events are now being used to justify sustained military action that risks placing the world on a permanent war footing. As health providers and concerned global citizens, we reject reliance on any narrow military solution to terrorism or to weapons proliferation. Particularly we believe that unilateral or pre-emptive military actions do not serve the legitimate desire of the world's people for peace and security. A cycle of violence, whether in language or action, erodes health and must be broken by employing non-violent responses. We resolutely affirm the need for alternative solutions to the terrible problems which beset humankind.

Concurrently with its increased military preparations, the US, along with many other nations, fails to support many potentially constructive international measures to reduce conflict and the threat of war. The US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) undermines any progress towards nuclear abolition by making thousands of nuclear weapons a permanent feature of US military strategy, and by ignoring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and other multilateral agreements. It promotes the militarization of space; seeks to justify the use of nuclear weapons against non nuclear states; and encourages new kinds of tactical nuclear weapons in ways that blur the moral and legal line between nuclear weapons and conventional weapons. As the strongest barrier against the use of nuclear weapons for 56 years, this line must not be blurred and must not be crossed.

We physicians from 32 nations affirm the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: We renounce war and seek diplomatic, peaceful solutions to war and conflict.

Current human military conflicts are characterized by civilian casualties, whether deliberate or unintentional. The global proliferation of small arms and light weapons has caused unspeakable carnage in both armed conflicts and domestic violence. Small arms target particularly the most vulnerable populations - the economically depressed and politically unstable.

With the adoption of the Mine Ban Treaty the toll exacted by antipersonnel landmines has diminished. But many key nations, including the US and Russia, still refuse to sign the Treaty, while landmines continue to devastate the lives of individuals, families, and whole societies. This is an inexcusable humanitarian tragedy.