

HELSINKI DECLARATION

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More than 60 years ago, the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put the world on notice that we are living on borrowed time. More than 40 years ago, physicians and scientists described how a nuclear war would kill tens of millions of people indiscriminately, destroy entire societies and ecosystems, and cause cancers and genetic damage in unborn generations. In time we learned that, at its worst extreme, a nuclear exchange involving thousands of warheads could cause a nuclear winter that would lead to the extinction of humankind.

Almost from the moment the first photos of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were published, the people of the world began to organize to demand that these weapons of mass extermination never be used again. Dr. Albert Schweitzer's 1957 radio broadcast in protest of nuclear weapons—what he called his Declaration of Conscience—set the medical and moral foundation for the abolition of nuclear weapons and of war itself.

As IPPNW convenes its 17th World Congress in Helsinki, the choices between war and better paths to peace, health, and security for all the world's people—even the survival of humankind on Earth—are as stark and urgent as they have been since the end of the Cold War.

The Middle East has just suffered another paroxysm of war, as a result of which the people on all sides of this decades-long conflict have been the real losers. Iraq has fallen into chaos as the result of a preemptive war and occupation based on the false claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. More than 100,000 people—soldiers and civilians—have already lost their lives to that unlawful war; hundreds of billions of dollars have been squandered that could have been invested in real health and security for the region and the world; and the daily toll of casualties continues unabated.

The polarization between the global North and the global South—one of the root causes of war in our time—is manifested in gross inequities in access to health, education, environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and security for billions of people in the world. These inequities exacerbate conflicts and lead to militarization, armed violence, acts of terror, and war. Small arms violence, in fact, is one of the leading public health problems in the world, taking tens of thousands of lives and causing hundreds of thousands of injuries worldwide every year. One of the keys to solving the problems of equitable, sustainable, and peaceful global development will be to ensure that developing and developed countries alike have access to clean, safe, renewable energy resources. Nuclear energy, which is inextricably linked to nuclear weapons, must be abandoned along with them as an unacceptable threat to the future.

As doctors, we are committed to the prevention of war and the establishment of global security frameworks based on health and human rights. To our dismay and outrage, however, the preeminent goal that has defined the mission of IPPNW for more than 25 years remains unfulfilled. We see no signs that the nuclear weapon states intend to eliminate their nuclear weapons, as they have committed themselves to do under

Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and as the International Court of Justice has said they are obligated to do under international law. To the contrary, some nuclear weapon states now talk openly about battlefield uses for atomic weapons. This threat drives more countries to acquire their own nuclear weapons as a deterrent and increases the risk of nuclear terrorism.

The abolition of nuclear weapons is an imperative human security goal that can no longer be postponed. The nuclear weapons states and the non-nuclear weapons states must come together without further delay to convene negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The security of the US would vastly improve in a world without nuclear weapons, and it should provide the leadership needed to achieve this goal. Russia, rather than squandering resources on new, multiple-warhead missiles designed to overcome US missile defenses, should join with the US to fully fund and implement a crash program to destroy its remaining nuclear weapons and to lock down all fissile materials so that they are beyond the reach of third parties.

The UK, rather than replacing its Trident submarine force with a new strategic nuclear weapon system, must declare itself the first nuclear weapon state of the original five to become a non-nuclear-weapon state, serving as a moral beacon for all the others. France, which has recently stated that it would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons in response to terrorism, must abandon plans for a new long range nuclear missile and show moral leadership in making Europe a nuclear weapons free zone. The European Union, rather than continuing to live with the contradictions between NATO nuclear policy and the Article VI obligations of the European states, must demand the removal of US tactical nuclear weapons from European soil and an end to nuclear sharing policies that have evaded the spirit, if not the letter, of the NPT.

India and Pakistan, rather than accelerating a nuclear arms race that, at the very least, will drain their economies of vital resources for health care, education, and development, and at worst might turn the region into a radioactive wasteland, must renounce nuclear weapons and provide joint leadership to establish a South Asia nuclear weapons free zone. Israel, rather than continuing to conceal its nuclear arsenal behind a policy of silence, should eliminate its nuclear weapons as part of a compact to create a Middle East nuclear weapons free zone. The DPRK must abandon its futile quest for security behind a nuclear arsenal and rejoin the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. Iran must give the world unequivocal assurances that it has no intention to acquire nuclear weapons, and the rest of the world must work with Iran to ensure that its legitimate security needs are met.

The world had a lucky escape from nuclear catastrophe during the Cold War. We may not be so lucky in the 21st century if we do not face up to the task we have been putting off since August 9, 1945. As a Nobel Peace Laureate and as a federation of doctors who understand that nuclear abolition is preventive medicine on a global scale, we urge the nuclear weapon states—and those flirting with the ambition to become nuclear weapon states—to release the world from our six-decade nuclear nightmare.