

ASTANA DECLARATION

**IPPNW 21ST WORLD CONGRESS
30 AUGUST 2014**

For more than 50 years, physicians concerned with the medical, environmental and humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have documented the extreme and unacceptable consequences of their use. The evidence accumulated over the decades since the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has convinced us that only the complete and rapid elimination of nuclear weapons from the world can assure us of a future. Even in a world without nuclear weapons, we face severe challenges from unsustainable living patterns, global warming, militarism and armed violence, economic inequalities, resource depletion, and the inexcusable poverty that afflicts billions of people on Earth. Only in a world without nuclear weapons, however, will we have a chance to solve those problems. The renewed awakening to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons that is now driving a political initiative for their abolition is the most hopeful development in more than 20 years since the end of the Cold War.

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has assembled in Astana, Kazakhstan for its 21st World Congress. The people of Kazakhstan have experienced the horrors inflicted by nuclear weapons first hand. From 1949 until 1989, the former Soviet Union conducted 467 nuclear tests at “The Polygon” in Semipalatinsk, without regard for the health and safety of those living and working near the test site. The Polygon was closed in 1991, and the nuclear testing programs of both the USSR and the US were halted, due in large part to courageous public protests by the joint US-USSR Nevada-Semipalatinsk Movement, in which IPPNW played a seminal role. The Kazakh victims of nuclear testing suffer terribly to this day from a whole range of radiation-related illnesses and this toll extends across multiple generations living in the contaminated area. We urge the Kazakh government to provide adequate and continuing healthcare and social protections to meet the ongoing needs of those exposed to nuclear test fallout. Kazakh survivors of nuclear testing bear witness to the dangers we all face as long as nuclear weapons exist. We stand in solidarity with our Kazakh friends in a common demand for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and we commend President Nazarbayev for his leadership in pursuit of that goal.

We call upon the governments of the world to consider all of the dangerous implications of the nuclear chain. Mining, processing, and exporting uranium raise grave health, environmental and proliferation concerns, and are serious obstacles to nuclear disarmament. We urge States to hasten both the arrival of a nuclear-weapons-free world and the transition to a sustainable, renewable, and safe energy system.

The region in which we have held this 21st Congress is presently beset by armed violence. The tragedy in Ukraine threatens to unravel decades of progress in relations between Russia and the United States—the two largest nuclear-armed States—and could deteriorate into outright civil war, setting those two great powers against each other once again, unless strong and effective diplomacy on all sides replaces armed violence. Ukraine made a historic decision in the 1990s—along with Kazakhstan and Belarus—to return the nuclear weapons based on its territory to Russia, following the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. The wisdom of that decision is evident today, given the catastrophe that could ensue from the introduction of nuclear weapons into the current conflict. Nevertheless, with Russia and the US holding

most of the 17,000 nuclear weapons in the world, thousands of which are on alert and ready to be launched on short notice, the possibility of their use, should events in Ukraine take a desperate turn, cannot be ruled out. The only way to avoid a relapse into the dangerous major-power antagonism the world was hoping had been left behind, is to make a good faith effort to find diplomatic solutions that respect the need for peace and security of all people in the region. First and foremost, the US and Russian presidents should take a joint decision to refrain from making nuclear threats—explicit or implicit—during this crisis.

In 2007, IPPNW launched ICAN—the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons—and is now the lead medical NGO in a campaign that has been embraced by 360 partner organizations in 93 countries. We have brought IPPNW's medical message about nuclear weapons and nuclear war—including our most recent findings on nuclear famine—to international conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW) in Oslo and Nayarit. Later this year, we will participate in the third HINW conference in Vienna, where we will join our ICAN partners in calling for negotiations on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons and pave the way for their elimination. The nuclear-armed States oppose such a treaty because, once adopted, it will tell them unambiguously that their continued possession, testing, manufacture, stockpiling, transport, and use of nuclear weapons are illegal and that they must negotiate the complete elimination of their nuclear arsenals without excuses and without delay. The ban treaty refutes the notion that only the nuclear-armed States can decide how, when, and under what conditions to complete the task of nuclear disarmament, as the World Court has said they are obligated to do. The step-by-step process favored by the nuclear-armed States is inadequate and, coupled with the modernization programs in which they are all investing hundreds of billions of dollars, is a formula for keeping nuclear weapons for the rest of this century and beyond. With sufficient courage and determination, the ban treaty, championed by ICAN and IPPNW, can be completed in a very short time, and can hasten the arrival of a nuclear-weapons-free world.

We recognize that a world without nuclear weapons is not a world at peace, free from the carnage of war and other forms of armed violence. For this reason, we have worked for more than a decade through our Aiming for Prevention programs to address the problem of armed violence. Numerous major conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, some recent, some decades old, result in the violent deaths of tens of thousands of people every year. Thousands of other lives are lost to armed violence in dozens of smaller, but no less tragic, conflicts around the world. While recognizing the unacceptable toll taken by armed violence in all its forms, this Congress calls for ceasefires both in Ukraine and in the Gaza Territory as immediate priorities. We reiterate our urgent appeal for a diplomatic solution to the complex and contentious political issues in Ukraine. No effort must be spared in bringing the warring factions together to end the tragic and violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to achieve a comprehensive Middle East peace.

As physicians, we are too well aware of the impact of armed violence on individuals, families, and entire communities, as well as on our capacity to provide for public health. Global military spending in 2013 was US \$1.75 trillion—2.4% of world GDP—according to SIPRI. These obscene levels of expenditure on weapons, preparations for war, and the actual fighting of wars, not only fuel the carnage we are witnessing around the world, but also drain resources from health care, education, basic human needs, environmental protection, and all the other social investments that are essential to development and real security.

A small but important step in the right direction was taken last year when the UN General Assembly adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). As of today, 118 States have signed the ATT, but only 44 States have ratified it. Fifty ratifications are required for the Treaty to enter into force. We urge every State that has not yet signed the ATT to do so. Every signatory State should ratify the Treaty without delay, to ensure that the uncontrolled flow of arms into conflict zones and into the hands of human rights abusers can be prevented.

We live in dangerous times, surrounded by challenges that can seem intractable. Yet we also see signs of hope. We leave Astana recommitted to achieving a world without nuclear weapons and without war, which provides for the health, safety, and security of all.