

# VITAL SIGNS

NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR (IPPNW)



“Nuclear weapons are the most powerful and most indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction ever invented. Knowing what we know now about their catastrophic consequences and the impossibility of any adequate humanitarian response, we must do everything to ensure that they are never used again.”

~ From Ireland's opening statement at ban treaty negotiations

## One step closer to banning nuclear weapons

Negotiations on a new treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons have begun at the UN, and states leading the process have set an ambitious goal of producing a completed agreement by July. If they succeed, nuclear weapons will formally be declared illegal, and the nuclear-armed states will have to choose between complying with the new prohibitions or being tagged as outlaws.

The ban treaty will also pose a challenge to nuclear-dependent states, such as Japan, Australia, and NATO members: they will either have to end their extended deterrence relationships with nuclear-armed states or find themselves on the wrong side of international law.

The negotiations, authorized by the General Assembly at the end of last year and chaired by Costa Rican ambassador Elayne Whyte, began as this issue of *Vital Signs* was going to press and will continue through July 7.

IPPNW co-president Tilman Ruff called the negotiations “historic.”

“They are the most promising development in nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War,” he said. “A treaty banning nuclear weapons will be concluded by a large global majority of states, whether nuclear-armed and nuclear-reliant states like it or not. And it will change the game in disarmament.”

Most of the nuclear-armed states are boycotting the negotiations (China and India sent delegations to the organizing meeting). The Netherlands is the only NATO state at the conference, as the result of intense pressure from the Dutch parliament and ICAN campaigners.

The key to the success of the negotiations, Dr. Ruff said, is that the conference is working under General Assembly rules, which means that no state can block adoption of the treaty with a veto. “Consensus, while

desirable, is not required and the final decision can be made by majority vote.”

IPPNW and ICAN, which have played a major role in making the humanitarian case for the ban treaty, will be active civil society participants

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# NUCLEAR ABOLITION NEWS AND UPDATES



For more information, please contact John Loretz ([jloretz@ipnw.org](mailto:jloretz@ipnw.org))  
or follow on [twitter.com/JohnAtIPPNW](https://twitter.com/JohnAtIPPNW)

## No responsible hands for nuclear weapons

The election of Donald Trump “has demolished a critical underpinning of nuclear deterrence policy: the requirement that the arsenals of the nuclear-armed states would be controlled by responsible leaders. It is time to acknowledge that these weapons are simply too dangerous to exist.”

IPPNW co-president Ira Helfand made this blunt assessment of the increased risk of nuclear war following the US election in a letter published by the *New York Times* in February. A few days earlier, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* had announced it was moving the Doomsday Clock to 2-1/2 minutes before midnight. The Trump election, said the *Bulletin* editors, weighed heavily in their judgment that we are closer to catastrophe than at any other time in the Clock’s 70-year history.

For decades, the nuclear-armed states—and states that claim to be dependent upon the nuclear weapons possessed by others—have taken refuge behind the argument that nuclear weapons in responsible hands keep the peace and promote global stability.

That argument always rang hollow. As former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon famously stated, “there are no right hands for the wrong weapons.”

The launch codes for the US nuclear arsenal—one of the two largest in

the world—are now in the hands of an erratic and volatile individual who appears to be profoundly ignorant about the forces he now has the authority to unleash. Trump has called for dramatic increases in nuclear weapons spending, despite the fact that the Obama administration had already approved plans to add new warheads, delivery systems, and infrastructure at a cost of \$1 trillion over 30 years.

The US is not alone, however, in displaying irresponsible behavior with nuclear weapons. Last June, the British Navy, which draws from a pool of submarine-launched missiles shared with the US, test-fired an unarmed Trident missile off the coast of Florida. The missile was supposed to go out over the southern Atlantic, but veered off course and headed in the other direction over the US mainland.

The British government withheld the fact that this had happened from Parliament just as an important debate was starting about the UK’s controversial plans to replace the Trident system at enormous cost to British taxpayers. When asked during that debate if she would hesitate to use nuclear weapons, knowing that this would kill hundreds of thousands of people, Prime Minister Theresa May answered “no.”

Russia has reportedly moved nuclear weapons closer to its border with Eastern Europe; India and Pakistan are waging a nuclear arms

race in South Asia reminiscent of the Cold War; and the shadow of nuclear weapons constantly hovers over the Middle East. North Korea conducted a provocative missile test during the first post-election visit of the Japanese prime minister to the US.

Only one leader of a nuclear-armed state has had anything sensible to say about nuclear weapons in recent months. In January, President Xi of China said “nuclear weapons... should be completely prohibited and destroyed over time to make the world free of them.” IPPNW quickly responded by urging China to participate in the ban treaty negotiations, adding that this would send “a strong signal to the other eight nuclear-armed states that their objections to the negotiations and their criticisms of the treaty itself are misplaced.”

The world is a more dangerous place than it was a year ago, and the dangers are increasing. The one bright spot is the nuclear weapons ban treaty, currently being negotiated in New York. More than 100 countries have shown the courage to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons and have charted a practical course toward that goal. Nuclear abolition, if not the weapons themselves, is finally in the right hands. 🇺🇸

[One step closer to banning nuclear weapons continued from pg. 1]

in the negotiating conference, advocating for the strongest possible treaty language. ICAN has urged the negotiators to establish clear prohibitions on development, production, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer, deployment, use, and threat

of use of nuclear weapons. The treaty should also provide an obligation for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and a framework to achieve it.

“We believe that through its normative force, the nuclear-weapon ban treaty will affect the behavior of nuclear-armed nations even if they

refuse to join it,” said ICAN executive director Beatrice Fihn. “It will also affect the behavior of many of their allies that currently claim protection from nuclear weapons, including those in Europe that host nuclear weapons on their territory. It will contribute significantly towards achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.”<sup>15</sup>



Booklet text and layout: Tim Wright Illustrations: Jenny Jordahl



For live reports and updates from the ban treaty negotiations:

IPPNW blog ([peaceandhealthblog.com](http://peaceandhealthblog.com)), follow us on Twitter (@IPPNW), and visit the ICAN website ([icanw.org](http://icanw.org))

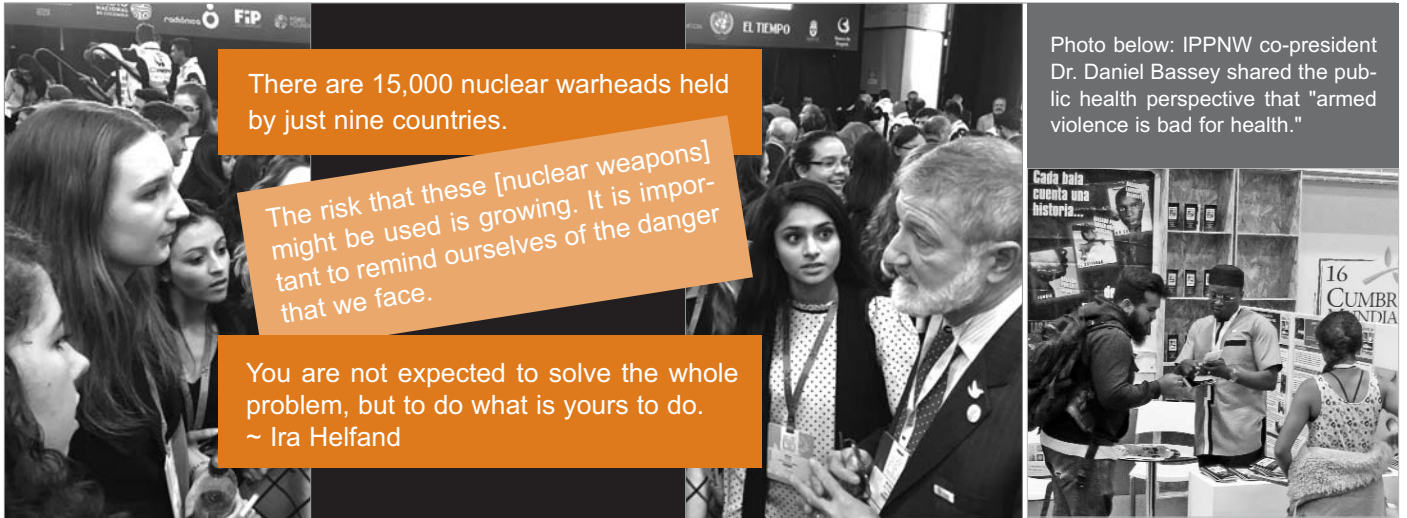
**ICAN has released an important new resource** for the historic negotiations at the United Nations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. This booklet explains the potential impact of the treaty, and how the negotiations have come about. ICAN is calling for the agreement to prohibit such activities

as the development, production, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer, deployment, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. It should also provide an obligation for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and a framework to achieve it.

**PDF DOWNLOAD:** 2017 ICAN booklet on the ban treaty [www.icanw.org/campaign-news/new-booklet-ban-nuclear-weapons-2017/](http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/new-booklet-ban-nuclear-weapons-2017/)

# Nobel Laureates: Time to prohibit nuclear weapons is now!

16th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Bogota, Colombia



There are 15,000 nuclear warheads held by just nine countries.

The risk that these [nuclear weapons] might be used is growing. It is important to remind ourselves of the danger that we face.

You are not expected to solve the whole problem, but to do what is yours to do.  
~ Ira Helfand

Photo below: IPPNW co-president Dr. Daniel Bassegy shared the public health perspective that "armed violence is bad for health."



Photo below: Dr. Helfand spoke to a group of survivors and activists from the Colombian peace process. Seated next to Lisa Clark (in middle) from the International Peace Bureau, and Rigoberto Menchú Tum (on right), a Guatemalan activist who received the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.


Photo above: "To change rifles for words, bullets for ideas, armed struggle for democratic debate, hatred for reconciliation... That's what peace is about." President Juan Manuel Santos is the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, "for his resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end".



Twenty Nobel Peace Laureates have joined IPPNW's call for a new treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. In a statement released at the 16th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Bogota, the Laureates urged all nations "to work for the speedy conclusion of this treaty in 2017 and for its rapid entry into force and implementation."

IPPNW was represented at the Summit by co-presidents Ira Helfand and Daniel Bassegy (photographed with President Santos above). Dr.

Helfand worked the floor of the conference to enlist signatories to the statement, which got quick endorsements from the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Jody Williams. Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev was unable to attend the Summit, but sent word of his support.

"The danger of nuclear war is growing," the Laureates said. "The time for action is now. We must prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons." 

**ONLINE:** The full statement is on the IPPNW blog.  
[peaceandhealthblog.com/2017/02/05/peace-laureates-2/](http://peaceandhealthblog.com/2017/02/05/peace-laureates-2/)

**ONLINE:** Highlights from the summit in the *Bogota Post*.  
[bit.ly/2m5cd5A](http://bit.ly/2m5cd5A)

**ONLINE:** "Can we prevent nuclear war?" TedxVail, Dr. Ira Helfand  
[youtu.be/mUm82W7B2BY](http://youtu.be/mUm82W7B2BY)


## IPPNW welcomes China's call to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons; urges leadership at UN treaty negotiations

IPPNW affiliates have been urging China to participate in the upcoming United Nations negotiations on a new treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. In January, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared in a public speech at the United Nations in Geneva that nuclear weapons "should be completely prohibited and destroyed over time to make the world free of them."

By joining the negotiations, China would take a principled and practical step toward achieving this goal. Moreover, it would show that banning nuclear weapons is in the best interests of the nuclear-armed states, as well as the overwhelming majority of states that have already

renounced nuclear weapons. IPPNW is encouraged by the fact that China abstained from, rather than voting against, the UN resolution authorizing negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapon, and that China sent an observer to the organizing meeting for the ban treaty conference on February 16. We hope this is an indication that China intends to cooperate in good faith with the non-nuclear-armed states leading this historic process, with the goal of making the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons an unequivocal international norm.

China's participation would also send a strong signal to the other eight nuclear-armed states that their

objections to the negotiations and their criticisms of the treaty itself are misplaced, and that their massive reinvestments in nuclear warheads, delivery systems, and infrastructure are dangerous and contradictory to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The obligation to achieve that goal is spelled out in Article VI of the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and the International Court of Justice has unanimously said that all nations, whether or not they possess nuclear arms, have an obligation under international law to negotiate nuclear disarmament. 

## Bridging the Cold War divide, again

Last February, IPPNW returned to Moscow amidst growing tensions between Russia and the US and its NATO allies.

At a high-level symposium on global security, co-organized by IPPNW and Russian Pugwash, Russian academicians and international physicians addressed key risk factors that are increasing the likelihood of nuclear war, the humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and measures to be taken to prevent catastrophe. Several prominent representatives of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which hosted the event, and the Russian Duma (parliament) were in attendance.

The following day, IPPNW's US and Russian co-presidents, Dr. Ira Helfand and Dr. Vladimir Garkavenko, were invited to personally deliver a letter from the

symposium to Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev. The letter warned that the danger of nuclear war "is now greater than at any time since the height of the Cold War" and that the use of "less than 0.5% of the world's nuclear arsenals would cause climate disruption across the planet, a decade long decline in food production, and a global famine that would put some 2 billion people at risk."


The letter went on to urge Russia to join the United Nations negotiations on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons, which pose the "only existential threat to Russia's survival as a great nation" and cautioned that "[w]e cannot expect our luck to hold forever, and hope for continued good luck is not an acceptable policy. These weapons must be eliminated as soon as possible before our luck runs out." 

Photo: NATO



**ONLINE:** Letter from the symposium [news.ippnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Atomwaffen/Letter\\_IPPNW\\_Medvedev.pdf](https://news.ippnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Atomwaffen/Letter_IPPNW_Medvedev.pdf)

# IPPNW loses a shining light

A tribute to Dr. Robert Mtonga, our former co-president, colleague, and friend

**ONLINE:** [peaceandhealthblog.com/2017/03/08/mtonga](http://peaceandhealthblog.com/2017/03/08/mtonga)



The IPPNW universe has lost one of its brightest stars with the sudden passing of our former co-president Dr. Bob Mtonga of Zambia. He was only 51. “Guns are bad for health” was his mantra, and it extended from the inhumanity of cluster bombs to the scourge of small arms. His prescriptions for peace resounded through the chambers of the United Nations to the halls of national government offices and helped form the political will to pass historic agreements including the Cluster Munitions Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty. With his warm spirit,

engaging smile, and persuasive knowledge about the health consequences of armed violence, he convinced even hardened diplomats to “listen to your doctor.”

Bob was as comfortable in a suit and tie debating policy makers as he was dressed in jeans protesting on the sidewalks of cities. He regularly crisscrossed the globe for peace even as he served his family and community in Lusaka, a role model for young men who found refuge on the football team he sponsored and for medical students inspired to follow his path. Bob was that rare com-

“As somber as our work often is, he always had that amused twinkle in his eye. Some people work for peace because they hate injustice. I think Bob worked for peace because he loved people which is an even more powerful motivation.”

~ Ira Helfand, IPPNW co-president

bination of a dreamer and a doer, an idealist and a clear-eyed pragmatist. His innate kindness and belief in the decency of others influenced his remarkable ability to find paths through the most tangled problems. When asked for advice on how to move forward on a thorny issue, he often replied “do the needful.” IPPNW colleagues and fellow peace campaigners throughout the world who were lucky enough to have called Bob a friend can best honor his life by doing just that. **vs**

~Maria Valenti, Program Director, Aiming for Prevention

IPPNW has created the Bob Mtonga Memorial Scholarship to encourage African medical students to continue his work for peace, disarmament and health. Contact Michael Christ, IPPNW Executive Director, at [mchrist@ippnw.org](mailto:mchrist@ippnw.org) for details.

## World Medical Journal warns nuclear war risk growing



The role of the health community in preventing nuclear war was the subject of a major article in the *World Medical Journal* this past October. Among the authors were IPPNW co-presidents Tilman Ruff and Ira Helfand, and Prof. Sir Andy Haines, an advisor to UK affiliate, Medact.

weapons before they are again used in war,” the authors concluded.

The World Medical Association considers the elimination of nuclear weapons a duty of health professionals, and has joined with IPPNW in supporting the negotiations for a ban treaty.<sup>vs</sup>

“All other global health progress and efforts could come to nought if we do not succeed in eradicating nuclear

**ARTICLE ONLINE:** *WMJ* 03 2016, pg. 86  
[www.wma.net/en/30publications/20journal/](http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/20journal/)

## A man of science dedicated to ending war, abolishing nuclear weapons

Professor Henri Firket, a pillar of IPPNW and the affiliate in Belgium, passed away in the end of February.

Dr. Ulrich Gottstein of Germany spoke of Professor Firket fondly: “I will miss the friendship of Henri who was of highest intelligence and historical knowledge. In all conversations you could learn from him. He was a committed humanist, urging

for peace and reconciliation, for studying and improving the root causes of war and of nuclear war. He was important for IPPNW.”

Professor Firket (photo on right) with the former president of the Belgian Senate, Anne Marie Lizin, during a Dialogue With Decision Makers meeting in Brussels in March 2006.<sup>vs</sup>



## Health through Peace 2017

*Confronting War, Militarization and Global Insecurity as an International Health Community*

September 4-6, 2017  
 University of York, United Kingdom

Health Through Peace 2017 will provide a unique opportunity for delegates to join hundreds of health care providers, students and peace activists at the University of York. Across a three-day program, you will have the chance to network with key organizations and leaders in the fields of peace, health and nuclear abolition.

Joint Medact Forum  
 and 22nd IPPNW World Congress



**Web:** [healththroughpeace.org](http://healththroughpeace.org)  
**Email:** [conference@medact.org](mailto:conference@medact.org)

Register  
 online  
 today!

**European Student Conference  
and Western Balkans Meeting**  
May 25–28, 2017 || Prishtina, Kosovo

**Negotiating conference for the treaty  
to prohibit nuclear weapons**  
June 15–July 7 || United Nations, New York

**IPPNW Medical Student Bike Tour**  
August 26–September 2, 2017 || Faslane to York (342  
miles /550km)  
**Online:** [www.ippnw-students.org/registration](http://www.ippnw-students.org/registration)

**Joint MEDACT Forum and IPPNW World Congress**  
September 4–6, 2017 || York, United Kingdom  
**Online:** [www.medact.org/project/forum-2017](http://www.medact.org/project/forum-2017)

**Symposium: “Crimes, Human Rights  
and Future Generations in the Nuclear Age”**  
September 14–17, 2017 || Monte Verità, Switzerland  
**Online:** [www.ippnw.ch](http://www.ippnw.ch)

**8th WHO Milestones in a Global Campaign  
for Violence Prevention Meeting**  
October 19–20, 2017 || Ottawa, Canada  
**Online:** [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/8th\\_milestones\\_meeting/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/8th_milestones_meeting/en/)

## Get involved!



Plan an event that highlights the devastating health impact of armed violence worldwide.

The theme for the 2017 Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence (June 5–12) is: “The Road to Development and Peace Begins with Silencing the Guns.”

[#WeekOfAction](#) [#SilenceTheGuns](#) [#IANSA](#)

Contact Maria Valenti ([mvalenti@ippnw.org](mailto:mvalenti@ippnw.org)) for more information.



**Partners in Peace** are instrumental in funding several aspects of IPPNW's ongoing work.

Give as little as \$5 a month and you'll continue receiving IPPNW's biannual newsletter, *Vital Signs*, and, if you wish, our monthly email newsletter filled with updates and action alerts.

**ONLINE:** [ippnw.org/donate.html](http://ippnw.org/donate.html)

IPPNW is a non - partisan federation of national medical organizations in 64 countries dedicated to safeguarding health by working to ban nuclear weapons and to address the impact of militarism and war on human health.

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339 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148 USA  
Tel:+1.617.443.1733 || Email: [director@ippnw.org](mailto:director@ippnw.org)

**Editor and Designer:** Aki Morizono **IPPNW Staff:** Michael Christ, John Loretz, Maria Valenti, Aki Morizono, and George Cani.

