

South Asian Students' Meet – A Call from Medical Community for the Prevention of Small Arms Violence

BACKGROUND

The student chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Nepal (PSRN) organised a two day **South Asian Students' Meet – A Call from Medical Community for the Prevention of Small Arms Violence** on August 28-29 in Bhaktapur, a historical city of Nepal. Bhaktapur lies to the east of capital city of Nepal and it is about 45 minute-busride from the capital city.

Aiming for prevention is the top priority programme of IPPNW. The spectre of small arms violence has been haunting our region these days. The independent studies carried out by Geneva based organisation, Small Arms Survey, has studied numerous aspects of small arms tragedies. And WHO has emphasised that public health approach has much to do with its solving. The ever burgeoning use of small arms has challenged our efforts for peace and development. So, genuine efforts for controlling violence and underlying ills that come courtesy of sociopolitical malfunction are essential.

PARTICIPATION

The students from different medical colleges and public health colleges of Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Germany had active participation in the programme.

Professor Dr. Mathura Prasad Shrestha, the President of PSRN and eminent figure of civil society, inaugurated the programme by his meticulously prepared speech highlighting on holistic approach to world peace and condemning on the prescriptive and patchy approach.

Er. Dr. Rajan Suwal praised the students' role for the cause of social responsibility. **Dr. Mahesh Maskey**, the former Vice President of IPPNW for South Asia and currently the Chairperson of Nepal Health Research Council, expressed his views on the issue and highlighted on the role of public health approach of solution to small arms violence. **Dr. Khagendra Dahal**, IMSR of

IPPNW, expressed his commitment for supporting IPPNW student activities fully.

Mr. Chudamani Giri, the National Student Representative of PSRN, highlighted the programme objectives and expressed his commitments to work for the IPPNW philosophy.

All the delegates were warmly welcomed by a Nepali cultural performance.

STUDENT PAPERS

There was a paper presentation session. Nepali students presented the IPPNW student activities in the country. Indian delegates had a paper on Global Warming and World Congress Preparation. Similarly delegates from Bangladesh and Germany also presented on IPPNW student activities in their country. Mr. Ashok Bhurtyal from Nepal had a picture presentation depicting a comparative study of socioeconomic productivity and health.

One bullet story of a case of 15 year old girl injured during tussle between police and civilians made the whole environment sobering. The expenditure after the bullet injury was beyond the affordability of her family, let alone the psychological trauma and mental scar that will remain throughout her life. Though she was fortunate enough to get the treatment, nothing in the world could compensate her lifelong suffering.

The next paper was presented by public health students from Nepal on topic **“Humanitarian and Public Health Consequences of Small Arms”**. The meticulously prepared paper depicted the gravity of the problem, its public health consequences and identified poor, women and children as the most vulnerable groups.

INTERACTIVE SESSIONS

On both days, delegates were divided into 5-6 groups and each group was allocated different issues ranging from health professionals role in protecting human rights to small arms violence, drafting letter to the President of USA calling for stoppage of war to finding solutions to regional ailments. Each group had a poster presentation after their discussion.

EXPERT PAPER

Professor Indrajit Rai, conflict specialist, clarified different dimensions regarding small arms and light weapons, experiences of arms management in countries undergoing conflict in special references to Nepal. **Prof. Rai** expressed his warmest thanks to health science students for their unique affection for social responsibility beyond academic dimensions.

SOLIDARITY FOR PEACE

Finally, all the delegates agreed on the Solidarity for Peace and signed the following draft of Solidarity for Peace:

“The South Asian Students’ Meet was held in Bhaktapur on 28th and 29th of August, 2007. The meeting enjoyed enthusiastic and active participation of students from India, Bangladesh and Germany besides Nepal. The meeting provided a forum for exchange of ideas, dissemination of information and discussion on common health related issues among students.

The presentations and discussions held in the meeting helped us get an insight into small arms violence in its various forms, the causes that lead to such violence, the magnitude of problem and the consequences. At the end of the session, we came up with following conclusions:

- 1. Small arms violence is a grave threat facing the world. There are health related, humanitarian and economic dimensions to its consequences.*
- 2. It exists in various forms in all parts of the world.*
- 3. Addressing the root causes is the only way to prevent the small arms violence.*
- 4. In our capacity as health science students, we can play important role in prevention and impact minimisation of small arms violence by:*
 - Raising public awareness about the hazards of small arms violence and encouraging its denouncement.*
 - Playing role in lobbying and pressure building at policy making level to reduce the investment in defence sector and enforcing strong laws to prevent such violence.*
 - Encouraging and participating in research works on small arms violence and its prevention*
- 5. We have decided to increase the interaction among the students by holding similar international meetings more frequently to build solidarity*

among the students of the region, to act for the prevention of small arms violence and for other common health related social and political ends.”

The program came to end with the concluding remarks from the National Student Representative of PSRN, Chudamani Giri



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Miss Abha Kiran K.C. hosting the Inauguration Ceremony



Prof. Dr. Mathura Addressing the Meet



Dr. Mahesh Maskey addressing the Meet



The Participants attentive to the Presentation



Delegates enjoying the lunch Lunch



Nepali Cultural Dance



Dr. Khasru from PSR Bangladesh



Milard from Germany



Group Discussion



Prof. Indrajit Rai talking on small arms



Students presenting "One Bullet Story"



Public Health Students presenting the Paper on Humanitarian Consequences of Small Arms



Mr. Chudamani Giri, from PSR Nepal Dr. Khasru from PSR Bangladesh and Gaurab from IDPD [from right to left]



Mr. Chudamani Giri concluding the Program



Delegates cheering on photo session



The Venue, Bhaktapur