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“Prevention of War is a Precondition for Prevention of Nuclear War”

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, and especially dear Ilkka and Vappu Taipale,

I thank you for the invitation and the great honor to speak at the opening ceremony of this important congress. “Aiming for Prevention – Small Arms, Gun-Violence and Injury” is indeed a topic that affects all people of good will – particularly today, 17 days after the tragedy in New York and Washington. Until now, “small arms” have been defined as “weapons that one to three people are able to carry”, but following the many terroristic actions carried out with explosive devices (e.g. in Israel) in addition to small firearms, the term “small arms” no longer has a clear definition. New developments in weapons have brought forth not only firing and exploding “small arms” –land mines, for example – but also easily portable containers of bacteria or poisons, to say nothing of nuclear bombs portable in suitcases or on the body. We usually refer to them as “mini-nukes”, but they are capable of causing “maxi-injury” – possibly much greater destruction and loss of human life than we are now mourning in New York and Washington.

“Small arms” without the capacity of mass destruction continue to facilitate the ongoing wars, more than 250 since the end of WW II, and have led to millions of killed and wounded people, among them the genocide of 1 million people in Rwanda 1994. For us in IPPNW, it is clear that if non-nuclear wars continue in all their cruelty, nuclear wars cannot be prevented.

I would like to begin my speech by posing a naïve question: why were nuclear bombs dropped onto Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although the war against Japan was almost over? As we know, the answer is: because that action prevented the deaths of about 1.000 more American soldiers, and also because the USA wanted to demonstrate its strength to the Soviet Union. I remember August 1945 well; at the time, I was a British prisoner of war in the PoW camp in Sheffield. We were told nothing about the immediate deaths of about 200.000 Japanese civilians and Korean prisoners of war; rather, we learned only that Japan had capitulated and that World War II was over. We were very pleased by the news. It was not until later that the entire scope of the human tragedy became known, which would define the onset of a new era.

Since then – and still today – when American colleagues and friends are asked about their position on the nuclear attack, they usually answer that it saved the lives of about 1.000 soldiers. Their initial answer always fails to mention the fact that approximately half a million Japanese people died of its acute and long-term effects.
After 1945, the nuclear arms race began. For years, nuclear bombs were tested on a weekly or monthly basis - without any consideration for the health effects the fallout would have on the people, either those in the vicinity of the test sites in Nevada or Semi Palatinsk and throughout the world - and without any consideration for the natural environment.

Why?: Because of the hatred between the “Free West and the dictatorial East”, between “Capitalism and Communism”, because of the race between “The West” and “The East” to attain power and influence, and because of the many wars all over the world. The goal was not diplomacy and peaceful coexistence, but rather expansion of power. The superpowers threatened on another with war, and even a war of extermination, with no consideration for the Earth’s people. And even while they were increasing the total number of nuclear weapons to more than 50,000, the world powers waged proxy wars in many countries of the earth, primarily in the Third World. The losses among the civilian population were subsequently counted for statistical purposes, but they did not burden the conscience of the military, the so-called defense ministries, and the governments.

Although most people had hoped that nuclear weapons would remain in the sole possession of the USA and USSR, who later on would abolish them, rapid proliferation followed: Great Britain, France, China, Israel, at times South Africa, and finally India and Pakistan, became nuclear powers. Why? : Because these countries were either waging or expecting to wage war, since they were all living by the ancient Roman maxim “ si vis pacem para bellum” – “if you desire peace, prepare for war”. And all of those countries indeed waged war: to recall only a few examples, in Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, the Falkland Islands, Kashmir, India-Pakistan, Tibet, the first and second Gulf Wars, Chechnya, Yugoslavia, Israel’s wars with Arab countries, Palestine; and now the concerns of a new war in Afghanistan and in the Pakistani-Indian multi-ethnic states.

Every year since 1945, 20-35 non-nuclear wars have raged on our earth, more than 250 all together. It is thus no wonder that ever more countries desire to possess nuclear weapons. The Arab world did not condemn Iraq for being in the process of manufacturing nuclear weapons; after all, the desire for an “Arab or Iranian nuclear bomb” which was called “ Muslim nuclear bomb” was expressed several years ago. The “have-nots” view the existing “nuclear apartheid” as discriminatory. The nuclear powers´ contention that they need nuclear weapons for deterrence and to maintain peace is an argument that applies in the opinion of the “have-nots” equally to all other countries.

Meanwhile, the development of nuclear weapons has progressed even further: instead of huge nuclear bombs, nuclear missiles and smaller, easily transportable nuclear battlefield weapons are being manufactured by the hundreds or even thousands, and testing continues either at sub-critical levels or as computer simulations in laboratories. Since life had again flourished following the terrible effects of the nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – rather than the uninhabitable, contaminated nuclear wasteland left behind at Chernobyl – irresponsible warlords, whether government leaders or terrorists, will not think twice about using nuclear weapons if they are in a desperate situation or desirous of exterminating an archenemy.-We think of several
such warlords-. No matter who the terrorists are, responsible for the criminal tragedy of New York and Washington, they would have used nuclear weapons if they had had access to them.

What can IPPNW and other NGOs for Peace do to contribute toward preventing the outbreak of a war waged with nuclear weapons? Condemning nuclear weapons and demanding their abolition is urgent but not enough- and seems almost naïve. Desperate war-lords use the most effective weapons which they possess. As doctors, we are realists. We need to treat the causes of war and violence, and need to take preventive action against the outbreak of all types of war. When war threatens, diplomatic action must be taken immediately before it is too late ; in emergency situations, timely interventions of a “UN Police Force” or “blue helmets of the United Nations” is crucial. The horrible genocide in Rwanda could have been prevented if the UN-Peace Forces already stationed in the country had been supported, as Mr. Kofi Annan himself has declared years later.

Should a war break out, the neighbouring not involved countries and/or the United Nations must contribute to its rapid end and maintain peace with diplomacy instead of weapons shipments to one or both sides by the weapons exporting countries.

It is crucial – and indeed, this is the primary topic of the congress- to exert influence on the governments and their military industries. Over 90% of the weapons with which wars are waged in non-industrialized nations stem from foreign countries. In selling its weapons to buyers and attaining huge profits, the military industry does not distinguish between aggressors and defenders as long as they pay. The horrendous losses in the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which ended only last year with more than 200.000 killed and about the same number of seriously wounded, were caused by arms purchases in both the West and East which totaled more than 600 million US dollars. Lately the Ethiopian government published that they have spent 3 billion US Dollar on the war! Who gave them so much money for fighting a war ??

Let me repeat my remarks with absolute certainty: if the so-called conventional wars continue in all their cruelty, nuclear war cannot be prevented. IPPNW and other NGOs and grass-root movements must call on the United Nations and all governments, particularly the most influential, to no longer live by the ancient Roman maxim of “si vis pacem para bellum”- “if you desire peace, prepare for war”. What is needed instead is a war-prevention policy. Instead of funding only “defense ministries”, which are in reality “armed forces ministries” or “war ministries”, we must establish “war prevention ministries”, staffed by outstanding peace researchers, experienced diplomats, historians, economists, linguists, and others who call upon diplomatic intervention and help mediate before a war breaks out. Instead of spending huge sums for armed forces and weaponry – 800 billion USD worldwide, about 300 billion by the US every year – we must work against impoverishment in the poor countries, foster their economic stability and feel responsible for their well-being.

IPPNW must become a true and committed physicians’ peace movement.
Ladies and gentlemen, I had originally planned to conclude my remarks at this point. But in the face of the horrific events in the USA which have changed our world, I would like to read the text of the IPPNW appeal we drafted in Frankfurt, which is directed at the governments of the USA and Germany:

“We abhor the brutal terrorist attack against the USA, grieve for the thousands of dead and wounded, and feel deepest sympathy for the widows and orphans, citizens of both the USA and many other countries (including more than 100 Germans), and representing many different religions. We also mourn the human disaster breaking out in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the threat of war has caused hundreds of thousands of people to flee (as in Kosovo two years ago); they are desperate, hungry, sick, and homeless and many die.

It is now incumbent upon the so-called civilized world to provide immediate assistance to the innocent people, and not to augment the tragedy with the threat of bombing and war. Terrorism cannot be successfully fought against with bombs – such actions will only cause more terrorism. Acts of terror are committed by fanaticized individuals or small groups who possess no promising means of power to attain their goals-political or religious. Instead of fighting war the attempt must be made to target only those individuals who committed the crimes and murders, no matter how difficult this might be or how long it might take. We stand in solidarity with the American people and their government in our grief and willingness to help, but we do not stand in solidarity with demands for revenge and punishment of entire populations. We have often gone to Iraq on medical assistance missions. Iraq is a perfect example of how punishment intended for a regime only causes suffering among the innocent population, instead of affecting and weakening the regime itself”.

Thank you listening, and for allowing me to recite to you our IPPNW appeal, the content of which is an integral part of the Helsinki Congress with its theme of “AIMING FOR PREVENTION”.