Dear friends,

Welcome to Finland, a Northern Peaceful Country, which has the most weapons in households around the world. 1.8 million civilian used small arms or handguns are distributed among under 3 million households (or a population of 5 million), so that about one fourth of the households do have at least one gun, many do have many.

I hope still that you feel safe here – not because of those guns but because of our social policy, a part of the so-called Nordic Welfare State model.

Most of the guns do belong to hunters or sport-shooters. It is forbidden to carry a gun or even a knife at open places. People do not protect their property or integrity with guns and there is no real gun lobby here.

But still we have some problems. 3% of our men do kill themselves i.e. commit suicide. Of all women the figure is 0.5%. Shooting with a hunting gun or pistol/revolver is the most common method besides hanging. Suicide by shooting has been over ten times more common than is some Central European countries and depends of course of our culture and amount of weapons in households.

Murders we make about 150 annually. Perhaps 20% by shooting, mainly with knife. Most of them are made in bottlegangs. The murder rate is three times bigger than in some more civilized countries in Central Europe, but it is also three times smaller than in 1930’s in Finland. So murder rate is really a social phenomenon, which can be also influenced by social policy.

Both suicides and murders are deeply connected in Finland with the very low social status of poor, single and divorced men. We have driven such efficient family policy during decades or over a century that this group of men has become the last real lumpenproletariat of our country. If we could make a real Bismarckian or Beverian social political input, impact to solve this problem, we would get still more peaceful society here.

World wide small weapons are still greater and perhaps a more complicated problem than antipersonnel landmines, which will be forbidden even in Finland during this decade because of the effective world wide movement against those weapons. Small weapons are not only an
international problem connected to foreign policy, but even deeper connected to social policy inside the countries and between the countries. In Harlem a knife was called Equalizer. In many eyes Kalashnikovs and pistols are also thought to be equalizers. At this time after 11th of September we should start to talk still more about economical and social inequalities inside each country and between the countries and parts of the world. To use big weapons against small weapons does not go to the roots of the problems.

IPPNW and PSR in Finland have been very successfully campaigning against mass weapons, A-, B- and C- weapons. The S-weapons, small arms are also a mass weapon killing the large masses of civilian population around the world.

Now IPPNW and PSR in Finland have wanted to start a critical movement against small arms and their unhealthy consequences around the world. We want to start to mobilize the physicians and other health workers in the world to take part in this campaign. The international network against small arms, IANSA, has done already great work with the Red Cross, WHO and other international bodies and organizations. IPPNW and PSR will take their place in this common front of humanity.

Does power really grow from the mouth of a rifle, or does only violence grow from there – or counter-violence? We have to choose our ideology and culture. We have to choose between Singer and Kalashnikov, which both resist the tooth of time.

We like the Singers singing, not Kalashnikovs. Welcome to the first international Medical Congress on Small Arms, Gun Violence, and Injury, Aiming for Prevention.

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And after me we have a very nice song, Walking Mathilda, so the next speaker is a walking legend. Erkki Tuomija has been in the peace movement of Finland from the beginning of the Non-Aligned Peace Movement, 1963. He still carries a CND badge here, and when the Prime Minister of Sweden saw it, asked Erkki “Are you a peace man?” Erkki asked, “are you not?” So, he’s speaking next.