Plenary Contribution to IPPNW Conference “Aiming for Prevention: International Medical Conference on Small Arms, Gun Violence, and Injury.”
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We have come to the end of what I hope all can agree has been a very successful and worthwhile meeting. Its success has depended on the preparation and support by many persons, but I am sure you will allow me to single out Brian Rawson, from the IPPNW Central Office, for his gentle and persistent leadership. Brian has worked on this project for the past three years in consultation with the several Finnish organizers. Brian, IPPNW is proud of you, IPPNW is grateful to you.

Our Finnish colleagues have provided warm friendship and excellent hospitality under the leadership of the Chair for this session, Vappu Taipale, and her remarkable hippie Parliamentarian husband Ilkka. They have brought their own unique energies and influence to the support of the meeting, gathering for our benefit many resources from their country and their beautiful city.

I thank the main speakers for their serious work in preparing materials to stimulate and inform our interest, and all of you participants for your patient listening (especially those whose first language is not English), and your thoughtful commitment to a free and friendly exchange of ideas. I think you have made it a very important and successful meeting.

As a clinician concerned with the comfort and care of dying persons, when asked how to manage the suffering of a dying individual, I reply that there is no right answer. There are many contributions to pain and many strategies of potential benefit for its relief. We need for each patient a comprehensive analysis of those contributing factors and a wide range of relevant and evidenced options from which we can direct therapies appropriate for that patient in that situation.

So it is with this troubling area of small arms violence. For each situation there are multiple and diverse factors which feed it, and particular priorities to design and implement in confronting it.

But I also often quote the Romanian conductor and composer Celibidache, who has said, “What is written in the score is everything except what is important”. It is how the music is played which is important, and how care is provided to the dying. How we work on this vexing problem of small arms violence is also important. The problem we face is bewildering in its size and extent. We are asked to think globally and act locally – to
understand its wide extent as comprehensively as possible, and to focus energy in specific action where opportunity presents. There has been an excellent spirit here, a recognition of what we have to learn from each other, and how we need each other if the wide range of matters which attend this regrettable issue are to be addressed. Workers for peace are not themselves immune from conflict. One of my friends is fond of quoting, “He stared at me as fiercely as any pacifist”.

Therefore I commend to you the opportunity for gathering again at two major meetings planned for North America next year – the 15th Congress of IPPNW Washington (May 3-5), followed closely (May 12-15) by the Sixth World Conference on Injury Prevention in Montreal – but particularly the special free meeting on Small Arms Violence to be held on Saturday May 11, an add-on session to the main event.

It’s a bewildering area that we face – it’s huge. We talk about think globally and act locally. And here we are faced with trying to grapple with a very comprehensive view of the whole, and at the same time then focusing our energies as specifically as we are able on particular points where there is opportunity for action.

So I want to suggest that you consider lending energy to three e-mail follow-up groups:

1. Research, to be led by Etienne Krug
2. Policy and Advocacy to be led by Wendy Cukier
3. An IPPNW group to be led by Brian Rawson which will direct interest to particular situations in which our affiliates are involved – Nicaragua and Kenya are examples.

We all have an email list in our Conference folder; if your email is missing or as listed is incorrect please correct it now with Brian. Indicate your interest to the leaders mentioned so that they may enlist your contribution in preparation for further discussion on May 11 next year.

In the final analysis, the escalating sum of human misery stemming from these weapons will only be reversed by a radical change – no less than a new way of thinking, one which rejects violence as a response to violence and which promotes harmony and cooperation in the place of intolerance and conflict. The path which leads in that direction is long and troubled, and its end is not in sight. But here we have taken a small step on that journey, and by traveling together we may hope to move forward more strongly and with a steady momentum.

The Australian physician John Billings, writing 40 years ago on the theme “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”, answered with a strong affirmative in these words: “There is no room for complacency. We must be prepared to live dangerously, and can expect to die tired”.

So, in closing this meeting, I read as a final document, the IPPNW Call to Action.