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Statement of IPPNW physicians on the situation in the Ukraine

In 1985, at the height of the Cold War, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its East-West cooperation to prevent a nuclear catastrophe. The current crisis in Ukraine requires us to remind President Obama in the USA and President Putin in Russia that there are still thousands of nuclear weapons on high alert, set to launch on warning within minutes.

We know—and have new evidence—that even a small percentage of those weapons, if launched, would kill millions of people immediately, and would alter our climate in ways not seen since the last ice age—quite possibly killing 1-2 billion people. The current arsenals of Russia and the USA, totaling around 15,000 warheads, are sufficient to literally end life on this planet several times over.

The current crisis in Ukraine is of complex origin and of large humanitarian consequence. It may lead to Ukraine re-acquiring nuclear weapons (which they voluntarily renounced in 1991). It threatens to re-ignite the Cold War and risks involving the use of nuclear weapons accidentally or on purpose.

As Russian, American, Ukrainian, and German doctors and leaders of IPPNW, we together call upon the parties to immediately cease the violence and to re-emphasize diplomatic communication between the USA and Russia, to assist Ukraine to resolve the crisis peacefully.

Furthermore, we hope the parties recognize the potential existential threat posed by a return to nuclear-armed antagonism. We call for renewed efforts to finally negotiate an end to the risk of nuclear war by making the historic decision to take the weapons off high alert and then ban and eliminate them. We are living in the most dangerous time since the end of World War II, and this is our joint prescription for our survival.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of IPPNW,

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