



International Physicians
for the Prevention of Nuclear War



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Nuclear power has no place in a healthy, sustainable future
IPPNW statement for COP26 UN Climate Change Conference 2021
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The goal of this year's COP26 UN climate change conference is clear: "The world needs to halve emissions over the next decade and reach net zero carbon emissions by the middle of the century if we are to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees." Yet the trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions is still upward. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' *Our Common Agenda* report to the UN General Assembly last month makes clear: "humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: a breakdown or a breakthrough. ... The choice is ours to make; but we will not have this chance again."

It is crunch time for humanity. We have already entered an era of escalating impacts from global overheating. We need to lower greenhouse gas emissions now.

And we need to recognise that humanity and the biosphere face another existential crisis of humanity's making: the growing danger of nuclear war. Too few people appreciate that the stable and hospitable climate we need to survive and thrive depends not only on preventing runaway heating, but also preventing the ice age conditions that would be brought on within days of a nuclear war, even in one region of the globe and involving less than 2% of the global nuclear arsenal. Nuclear weapons are global suicide bombs. Last year, the Doomsday Clock was moved further forward than it has ever been - 100 seconds to midnight, with the assessment: "The international security situation is now more dangerous than it has ever been, even at the height of the Cold War." This year, the hands remain at 100 seconds to midnight.

Confronted by these existential dangers, we do not have the luxury of time. We have precious little margin for error left. It is vital that we make wise choices, act boldly and fast. We need win-win solutions, not measures to address one existential threat which exacerbate the other. Enrichment plants which can enrich uranium to both reactor or weapons grade, and accumulating plutonium in spent reactor fuel, are means for nuclear proliferation and increasing the danger of nuclear war - not a climate solution but a fool's bargain.

Armed conflict and war, and with them the danger of nuclear escalation, are already proliferating in an increasingly climate-stressed world.

In the lead-up to COP26, there has been another round of concerted and increasingly desperate attempts to portray nuclear power as an acceptable, safe and low carbon energy source that can help address the climate heating crisis. We reject this deception, which serves only those with vested interests in the nuclear power industry, and those whose motive is not safe low carbon electricity, but maintaining or being in a position to build nuclear weapons. Nuclear-armed states use investments in ostensibly civilian nuclear capacity and infrastructure, and training of nuclear scientists and engineers, to support their military nuclear programs. These governments utilise

the civilian nuclear industry for weapons purposes through hidden subsidies involving human resources, research funds and investments in dual-use nuclear infrastructure.

More than 20 years ago, our global federation recognised that nuclear power is not healthy, safe or sustainable; that it inevitably generates materials that can be used to build nuclear weapons; that each nuclear reactor and spent fuel pool is effectively an enormous, pre-positioned radiological weapon or 'dirty bomb' vulnerable to accident and attack; that the health risks of intensely radioactive materials and waste produced by nuclear reactors extend across generations over geological time frames. We recognised that there are far healthier, safer and more effective ways to produce energy. We called then for no new nuclear power plants to be built, and for existing plants to be phased out at most by the end of their license periods. That assessment was based on the then available evidence; it is even more valid today.

Over the past two decades, any economic rationale for nuclear power has long evaporated as renewable energy has become the cheapest, most widely and most quickly available source of new electricity generation worldwide, with sun and wind readily available in quantities orders of magnitude greater than human energy consumption.

We call on the world's people, businesses and governments to make the right renewable and efficient choices to deliver the urgent action that humanity and all living things need to turn down the heat on the climate crisis in ways that do not avoidably risk catastrophic tragedy and increase the danger of nuclear war. A healthy, safe, secure future can only be renewable, not radioactive.

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